PATTERNS
OF
POWER

The Seljuks and the Abbasid Caliphate

The Complete Study

1040 — 1055 — 1194

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with Claude (Anthropic)

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Held as tested, not revealed.
A case study in the Patterns of Power series.

Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

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PREFACE AND OUTLINE

Front matter · how this study was made, the disciplines it holds itself to, and a map of its fourteen parts

The collaboration

This is a case study in the Patterns of Power series, applying the series' framework to the Great Seljuk Empire and its guardianship of the Abbasid Caliphate — from the destruction of the Ghaznavid army at Dandānaqān in 1040, through Tughril's entry into Baghdad in 1055, to the killing of the last Seljuk sultan of Iraq in 1194. The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed and held: the floor of force beneath every order, the robe of doctrine laid over the floor to make the force cheap, the settlement that divides the spoils, the cost column in which each subject prices defection, the seam through which a people's beliefs are managed, the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction, and — running under all of it — position logic, the proposition that rulers in like positions converge on like answers because a position poses a problem with only a few good solutions.

The study was built the way the series is built, one module at a time. The author brought the framework, the direction and the judgement of the whole, and held the collaboration to its disciplines; Claude, Anthropic's model, did the research — verifying load-bearing quotations, dates and figures by search against sources reproducing the primary text before any module was written — and produced the drafts, each presented and confirmed before the next was begun. Where the research contradicted the framework's expectation, or contradicted the working notes carried into the study, the research was followed and the expectation revised. Several of this study's better findings are corrections to what it had predicted, and two of them are corrections made in the middle of the writing, after a module had already been drafted on the wrong reading.

What this case isolates

The Seljuks were chosen because they promised the other half of an experiment. The preceding study in this series found a dynasty that funded the corpus of its own legitimating doctrine and never built the credential that would have let it own the men who interpreted it, and was convicted out of its own commission. Nizām al-Mulk, the Seljuk vizier, is conventionally credited with building exactly that missing thing: a network of state-founded colleges producing orthodox jurists. The case was taken up to see what happens when a conquest completes the move the Umayyads left half-made.

It does not work out that way, and the reasons are the study.

The first correction is about the age of what the Seljuks walked into. It is usual to say they entered a world where Islam had been the furniture of reality for four centuries. Four hundred years is the age of the Arab conquest of Iraq. It is not the age of the population's Islam, which on the onomastic evidence was roughly a century and a half old and later still in Iraq than in Iran; and it is emphatically not the age of the thing the vizier spent his money on. The canonical collections of Prophetic tradition were about two centuries old. Ashʿarī theology was about a hundred and forty and so contested that one vizier had it cursed from the pulpits of Khurasan and his successor endowed chairs for it eleven years later. And Sunnism itself — four eponymous founders, all unimpeachable, the field closed against any fifth — takes its recognisable shape in this century, in a world where the founder of the sultans' own school of law had been, to the men who first used the word *Sunni*, a heretic.

So the belief was deep and the doctrine was not settled, and those two facts together are the condition the whole case runs in. The Seljuks did not walk into a finished house. They walked onto a building site and were handed a trowel. A study that reads deep belief as evidence of settled doctrine will misdate the college by three hundred years; a study that reads unsettled doctrine as evidence of shallow belief will not understand why, in 1072, a professor of law was driven to a public recantation because a stranger on a river-boat had wished aloud that he could find him and kill him.

The second correction is about what the Seljuks bought in Baghdad, and it required rewriting a module. The obvious explanation for the price of the caliph's endorsement is that a rival caliphate in Cairo was issuing competing paper — two suppliers, therefore a market. That is backwards. The scarcity is prior and internal: no armed competitor can be the author of his own title, because a title issued by a man who is currently winning is a report on who is currently winning and expires with it. The decree was worth having exactly and only because Tughril could not have written it. Cairo is not the price-setter. Cairo is the same move made by a house locked out of the first source,

and the existence of two answers to one question is a defect in the instrument rather than a virtue of it — a defect whose bill, in this case, was a Fatimid name in the Baghdad pulpit for forty Fridays and the caliph carried off up the Euphrates.

The problem of the sources

One difficulty had to be settled before a word was written, and settling it changed the shape of the study.

The text every account of this empire is built on is the Persian mirror for princes known as the *Siyāsatnāma* or *Siyar al-mulūk*, attributed to Nizām al-Mulk and composed around 1091. It is a magnificent source and it is also the subject of a live authorship dispute. Boris Zakhoder questioned the attribution in 1949 on grounds of register, anachronism and factual error; Alexey Khismatulin has argued in print that the text is a false ascription by the court poet Muʿizzī, produced to obtain a position at a new sultan's court; Neguin Yavari defends the traditional attribution on manuscript and citation grounds, and defends it well. The dispute is unresolved.

This study therefore uses the text throughout as **a court document of the 1090s and never as the vizier's testimony about his own achievements**. That is a loss and it is also a gain, because what a court finds it necessary to prescribe is a map of what is going wrong, and a text read as advocacy rather than as record yields more. Its instruction that revenue assignees be rotated every three or four years so that they do not grow strong is a confession that they were not being rotated. Its complaint that the Seljuk realm is alone among Muslim states in maintaining no network of informers is a confession that the surveillance apparatus the vizier is universally credited with did not exist.

Its place as the study's spine was taken by a book nobody had thought to put there: al-Māwardī's *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya*, written in Baghdad in the 1050s by the caliph's own chief judge, which contains both the legal fiction that made the whole Seljuk arrangement lawful and the law of *iqṭāʿ* that determined what the Seljuks could and could not give their soldiers. It is out of copyright, it is quoted here exactly in Arabic with translations of my own, and it was written before the men it describes arrived.

The rest of the evidence is of uneven quality and the modules say so. The coins are the firmest thing in the case. The narrative chronicles are later, partisan and generous with round numbers, so every figure in this study is a range and several are refused outright. The biographical literature that supplies the study's best single scene — a jurist's recantation before a crowd in 1072 — is transmitted by men with a declared interest in the fact of the repentance, and is reported as their account rather than as

established fact.

The disciplines

Five rules govern every module.

Quotation. Public-domain primary sources — legal texts, coin legends, chronicle testimony where the text is out of copyright — are quoted exactly, in the original where the wording is the evidence, because in a legal fiction the precise words are the argument. Modern copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased, briefly, and credited.

No fabrication. No quotation, date, attribution or figure is invented or reconstructed from memory. What could not be verified is dropped or flagged, never guessed, and this study flags a great deal: a remark attributed to Tughril at Nishapur that would have opened Module 1 beautifully was dropped because it could not be checked against a text reproducing the original. Contested figures are given as ranges. Where the material supports no figure at all — the size of the army, the revenue of the empire, the casualties at Ani, the number of cultivators under assignment — none is given, and the absence is recorded as itself a fact about the case.

Gravity without partisanship. Suffering is held with weight and neither dramatised nor discounted, and neither the conquerors nor the conquered are flattered or demonised.

Legibility is not pardon. Explaining how an order made its force lawful is the opposite of excusing it, because lawful extraction is worse than the other kind rather than better: it is durable, it can be defended in the language of the people it takes from, and it produces no scandal.

Held as tested, not revealed. The pattern is treated as something discovered and tested against the evidence, not handed down as doctrine — a tendency, never a law, and one corrected wherever the record refuses it.

What this case added to the framework

The central contribution concerns the source of title and the direction of the transaction. An apex stripped of force and revenue but left holding the power to declare things lawful will begin manufacturing the legal instrument by which its own dispossession is made lawful, because that instrument is the only remaining thing it has to sell — so that the terms of legitimation can be drafted in advance of the man who will need them, and the chair a conqueror walks into is not the same object when its occupant has spent sixty years advertising what sitting in it means. From which follows a proposition tested inside the case and confirmed: the soundness of a source of title is inversely related to its capacity to enforce, so that a source which arms itself converts into a claimant and forfeits the immunity that made it worth going to. The Abbasid caliphate was physically untouchable for two centuries while it was harmless; within seventeen years of acquiring an army, one caliph had been defeated in the field by his own sultan and murdered and his successor besieged and deposed.

Beneath that, a series of refinements the case forced. That belief and doctrine naturalise on separate schedules, so that a population may hold its faith as the shape of the world while the content of that faith is being fought over in the street. That a state may buy an interpretive class's premises, payroll, syllabus and prestige and still not acquire its certification where the licence runs person to person rather than through an institution — so that the test is not how much a ruler spends but where the licence lives, and money spent into an open doctrinal field buys a faction rather than an authority. That a borrowed doctrine is not only an asset that makes force cheap but a set of binding restrictions on how the conqueror may pay his own army, and that a grant is only as cancellable as the granting state's reach on the day the cancellation is attempted. That paying an army in revocable revenue assignments and paying it in land are not a good option and a bad one but two failure modes with different clocks, the first destroying the state's authority in generations and the second its base in harvests.

That where a conqueror's advantage is mobility rather than mass his hold is cheap to establish and hard to keep, because the property that makes his army uncatchable makes it unquarterable and indifferent to the country it has taken — so that purchased soldiers should be looked for early, as a logistical necessity rather than a considered policy. That an order can be cheap because its belief took or cheap because it has not yet been assembled, and for the first generation the two are indistinguishable in the record. That cheapness of belief is not slack but a saving already taken, leaving nothing to economise on when the military accounts come due. That an order's information capability should be scored on two axes rather than one — what it can tell everyone and what it can find out — because a state strong on broadcast and blind on collection is

characteristically killed by whisper networks, and that the absence of surveillance may mean the belief took, or that the machinery was unaffordable, or that the ruler feared his own informers more than his enemies.

That an instrument of investiture is structurally incapable of solving succession, because ratification must follow the accomplished fact or it is worth nothing, and that heritability multiplies lawful claimants rather than reducing them — so that such an instrument does not fail to solve the coordination problem but solves it one level up, making the lineage uncontestable and every succession within it a war. That the most durable counterweights in an order are the ones nobody authored, arising from the technical form of an institution rather than from any constitutional intention, because a granted liberty has an author who can withdraw it and a structural accident has none — and, against that, that plurality is a property of a class before it is a property of a society, so that the useful question is not how many counterweights exist but how far down the order the nearest one reaches.

And two propositions about how such an order ends and how it is remembered. That collapse should be sought among the parties left outside the settlement who nonetheless kept a capacity, rather than among the most oppressed, since oppression alone produces the absence of agency and not its presence. And that an order's visible legacy is a biased sample of its effects, biased toward whatever its beneficiaries recorded in materials that keep — so that where achievements were funded by extraction the two columns are not separate lines to be netted but one transaction seen from two ends.

The arc

A landscape opening and twelve modules, each with a framework function and its own title.

Landscape — the three orders on the eve. *A Contract Made Out of Necessity.* A failing land, a population whose faith was deep and whose doctrine was unsettled, a caliphate that had been a ceremonial office since 936 and had spent sixty years rebuilding the one thing cavalry cannot take — and a chapter in a judge's book, written in the 1050s, explaining exactly how a man who seizes a country by force may be made lawful.

1 — The Floor of Force. *A Gate of Iron and Locks of Copper.* An army hired to guard a frontier against men exactly like itself; a conquest won by outlasting rather than outfighting; walls that never failed and garrisons that did; and six hundred horsemen taking the seat of the Sunni caliphate and holding it for a year because the sultan was away killing his brother.

2 — The Settlement. *Not by Grant, nor by Sale, nor by Gift.* Why the soil of the empire's richest provinces was not the conquerors' to give, what a conquering army can be paid in when the law forbids giving it the ground, and why the decay of the arrangement involved no change to the law of the grant whatever.

3 — The Robe. *The Exalted Sultan, King of Kings.* Two borrowed titles on one coin; the document that was worth having only because its buyer could not have written it; the caliph's incapacity as the specification rather than the defect; and the stack of five questions beneath the investiture that no money could settle.

4 — Formation. *A Multitudinous Crowd Was in Attendance.* What actually made a Muslim of the eleventh century and who paid for it; why the vizier's colleges bought the premises and never the licence; and the afternoon a professor of law recanted before a crowd the state had not assembled and could not disperse.

5 — The Cost Column. *The Grass and the Payroll.* Two armies that had to be paid in currencies the same country could not both produce; a population that cost nothing to hold and therefore left nothing to cut; and an endowment built so that it could never be reached.

6 — Extraction. *Nothing Beyond the Lawful Assessment.* How a revenue reached a cavalryman; why the remedy for an entrenched assignee and the cause of the land's ruin were the same measure; and what the prohibitions in a court manual confess.

7 — Information and Suppression. *The Only Kingdom Without Informers.* A court text complaining that the state has no spies; an empire that could speak to every mosque in Asia every Friday and could not find out who had converted a garrison; and a castle it could see for a hundred and sixty years and never enter.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. *A Brother's Claim Precedes a Son's.* Two constitutions held sincerely at once, an author of title who could say who was lawful and never who was next, and the discovery that making a holding heritable multiplies the men entitled to it.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. *Must Not Be Prevented.* The counterweights this apex did not own, why nobody had designed a single one of them, and the exact line — the town wall — below which none of them reached.

10 — Change and Collapse. *The Libraries at Nishapur.* An empire at its greatest extent in the year a missionary took a castle; a caliph who armed himself and was killed for it; and the founding army coming back in 1153 to burn the schools.

11 — The Grim Accounting. *The Calendar and the Canal.* Two columns that do not net, and a record that survives in the materials the winners used.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. *An Office They Could Have Taken Any Morning.* The same argument fought in Latin Christendom in the same decades; why

one side could win it and the other could not; and the strongest case for the Seljuks, stated in full and answered — ending on the restraint that held for a hundred and fifty years because it was built into the arithmetic, and on the one man in the empire it never reached.

LANDSCAPE

A CONTRACT MADE OUT OF NECESSITY

Landscape · the three orders on the eve, a belief that was deep and a doctrine that was not yet settled, and the legal instrument drafted for the Seljuks before a Seljuk had reached Baghdad

The land that had been conquered twice

Begin with the ground, because the ground is the oldest thing in the case and the only party to it that could not move.

The alluvial plain between the Tigris and the Euphrates — the Arabs called it *al-Sawād*, the black land, for the darkness of its soil against the desert — had been the fiscal heart of the Sasanian empire, watered by canal works laid over far older beds, and it was taken from that empire by Arab armies in the 630s and 640s. What happened next is a settlement decision of exactly the kind this series exists to read, and the previous study in it ended by proposing a name for the fiction involved.

The conquered soil of the Sawād was not divided among the men who took it. The tradition attributes the decision to ʿUmar and reports it as deliberate: the land was to be held for the whole community rather than parcelled out to the conquering army, its cultivators left in place and taxed. Whatever the historicity of the attribution — and the reports reach us through a juristic literature with a strong interest in having the question already settled — the arrangement is not in doubt. Iraq's revenue was a stream running to a treasury, not a stock of estates running to families, and the men who had fought for it received entitlements out of a register rather than acres out of a survey. The Umayyad study proposed *perpetual dedication* as a settlement fiction beside vacancy, recognition and divisibility, and named its job as preventing a conquering army from becoming a landed class. The Sawād is where it was first performed at scale, and everything the Seljuks would later do with land in Iraq was done on top of it.

But the ground was failing, and that is the second fact.

The revenue lists preserved in the administrative tradition give the Sawād, under Hārūn al-Rashīd, a yield of the order of a hundred million dirhams a year; later

assessments in the same body of material return a small fraction of that. The lists are of contested reliability, the scholars who use them convert between dinar and dirham at different ratios — twenty to one and twenty-two to one are both in use — and no responsible reading takes any single number as an audited return. What survives the caution is the direction and the rough order of the fall, which is very large, and which David Waines and Michele Campopiano have connected not to accounting failure alone but to a genuine collapse of output: salinisation, canal silting, abandoned tillage, and tax farmers with every incentive to strip a district and none to maintain it.

Onto that slow decline fell one sharp event. In 937 or 938, during the fighting between the *amīr al-umarā'* Ibn Rā'iq and his own Turkish commander Bajkam, Ibn Rā'iq ordered the great dams of the Nahrawān canal destroyed to flood the plain and stop Bajkam's advance. It did not stop him — Bajkam entered Baghdad without opposition and took the office — and the canal was never adequately repaired. Hugh Kennedy's caution is the right one: the breach was the most dramatic instance of a widespread phenomenon rather than the single cause of anything. But it is a usable image of the whole period, because a state that will break its own breadbasket to delay a rival by a week has stopped behaving like a state that expects to collect from it.

This case therefore begins downstream of a metabolic catastrophe that nobody in it caused and nobody in it could reverse.

How old the belief was, and how new the doctrine

Now the correction that governs everything else, and it is the one most accounts get wrong in both directions at once.

It is usual to say that the Seljuks entered a world where Islam had been the furniture of reality for four centuries. Four centuries is the age of the conquest. It is not the age of the population's Islam, and it is emphatically not the age of the thing the Seljuks would spend their money on.

On the onomastic evidence assembled by Richard Bulliet, conversion in Iran was gradual and limited to the end of the Umayyad period, rose sharply after the Abbasid revolution, and reached something like eighty per cent of the population by around 950 — and Bulliet's data are urban and drawn from the religiously prominent, so the countryside was later. Iraq was later still: Thomas Carlson's work argues that the marginalisation of Christianity there took considerably longer than even the gradualist models allow, which means the Sawād in 1055 still carried substantial Christian and Jewish populations beneath the Muslim one. **The majority-Muslim condition in this territory was roughly a century and a half old when Tughril arrived — three to**

five generations.

That is long enough for everything that matters at the level of belief. A child born in Baghdad or Nishapur in 1020 was formed in Islam before he could weigh it, in a household and a quarter and a market that took it for the shape of the world; the commitments were sacred, the community was the community, and a man who got them wrong was not mistaken but polluted. The evidence for the depth of that formation is overwhelming and this study will produce a piece of it that ought to settle the question: in 1072 a professor of law was driven to a public recantation because he overheard a young stranger on a river-boat wish aloud that he could find him and kill him for the good of his own soul.

But what that young man believed he was defending had not been settled, and the fight over its content is the eleventh century.

Consider the age of the furniture. The canonical collections of Prophetic tradition were about a hundred and eighty years old. Ashʿarī theology was about a hundred and twenty and still fiercely contested — which is why, in 1053, it could be cursed from the pulpits of Khurasan as a policy rather than an outrage. Al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, the handbook that reconciled Sufism to the law, was written at Nishapur in 1045, ten years before Tughril entered Baghdad. The endowed college was a Khurasani innovation of the preceding two generations. Al-Māwardī's political theology was written in the 1050s.

And Sunnism itself was the newest thing in the room. The scholarship now places the emergence of Sunnism as a distinct community with a settled orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the eleventh century — the "big tent," with four eponymous founders all held unimpeachable and the field of schools closed, forms after 1000. Ahmad Khan's study of that formation turns on a fact that should govern this entire case: **to the medieval clerics who first spoke of "Sunni Islam," Abū Ḥanīfa was a heretic.** His transformation from an object of religious exclusion into a pillar of orthodoxy happens across precisely these centuries.

The Seljuk sultans were Ḥanafīs.

So the conquerors did not walk into a finished house. **They walked onto a building site, in the decades when the walls were going up, and were handed a trowel.** That is a different case from the one usually described, and it is why the module on formation is the centre of this study rather than a subordinate part of it.

Obedient to God

The second order on the eve is the caliphate, and its condition has to be stated precisely, because almost every account of 1055 states it too late.

The Abbasid caliph had not commanded his own soldiers within living memory of anyone's grandfather. The subordination begins at Samarra in the ninth century, where a Turkish guard raised to be the caliph's instrument discovered that an instrument in sole possession of force is not an instrument; four caliphs were killed or deposed by that guard between 861 and 870. The recovery under al-Muʿtaḍid was real and short. Then, in 936, the caliph al-Rāḍī — unable to fund an army, unable to collect from provinces that had stopped remitting — invited Ibn Rāʾiq to Baghdad and created for him the office of *amīr al-umarāʾ*, commander of commanders. Among Ibn Rāʾiq's first acts was the destruction of the Hujariyya, the last body of troops loyal to the dynasty as such.

That is when the arrangement this study is about was actually invented, and it matters that it was invented **nine years before a Buyid entered Baghdad**. The caliphate had already been converted into a ceremonial office standing over somebody else's army, by a caliph, in a document of appointment, under duress.

The Buyid arrival supplied the punctuation. Aḥmad ibn Būya took Baghdad on 19 December 945 without a fight, received from al-Mustakfī the title Muʿizz al-Dawla and the office of *amīr al-umarāʾ*, and on 29 January 946 — other accounts give 9 March — deposed him, had him blinded, and raised a son of al-Muqtadir who took the regnal name *al-Muṭīʿ liʾllāh*, the Obedient to God. Al-Muttaqī, whom al-Mustakfī had replaced, had been blinded by the Turkish *amīr al-umarāʾ* Tuzun eighteen months before. Two blindings in two years, and a throne name that reads as a job description.

What remained can be enumerated briefly. No troops. No revenue: a stipend, disbursable by whoever held Baghdad, which is why in the 1050s the Turkish general al-Basāsīrī could cut off al-Qāʾim's monthly subsidy as an ordinary move in a factional quarrel. A palace, a chancery, a household. The right to be named in the Friday sermon and on the coinage. And the power to invest — to say that a thing already done had been lawful.

He also still appointed judges, and it is worth recording where he drew a line, because a man's exceptions map what he thinks he is. The relationship between al-Muṭīʿ and Muʿizz al-Dawla is described as broadly cooperative; the notable rupture, between 961 and 963, was the Buyid amīr's attempt to farm out the appointment of the chief *qāḍī* of Baghdad to Ibn Abī al-Shawārib for two hundred thousand dirhams a year. A caliph who had accepted blinding, deposition, a stipend and a throne name

balked at the sale of the judgeship. That is a man identifying the last ground he is standing on.

The men from the mountains

The Buyids came from Daylam, the mountainous country south-west of the Caspian, a recruiting ground for infantry as Central Asia was for cavalry. The founders were three sons of a man remembered as a fisherman. Their formal position was always a grant: ʿImād al-Dawla, Rukn al-Dawla, Muʿizz al-Dawla, every title conferred by the caliph whose city they held. Later ʿAḍud al-Dawla added the Persian *shāhanshāh*, king of kings, reaching back past the caliphate to the empire the caliphate had destroyed — a second garment for a second audience.

Their confessional position is contested and this study says so rather than resolving it. They are described in the scholarship as Zaydī and as Twelver, and whether it varied by branch and generation is a further question. What is not contested is what they publicly sponsored. In 352/963 Muʿizz al-Dawla ordered the markets of Baghdad closed on the tenth of Muḥarram and public mourning held for al-Ḥusayn — the first state-mandated ʿĀshūrā' observance for which there is a clear report — and Ghadīr Khumm was likewise given official form. What that produced was not conversion but a fault line. Karkh, the great western commercial quarter, was pillaged in 959, burned in 971 with heavy loss, and burned again by 973, with the *ʿayyārūn*, the armed gangs of the quarters, working in the ruins. **Baghdad's sectarian geography was drawn by a state ceremony**, and the drawing had been done within living memory in 1055.

On the settlement side the Buyids did what every treasury-poor military regime does: they stopped paying soldiers in coin and began paying them in assignments on revenue. Muʿizz al-Dawla brought Daylamite troops into Iraq and settled them, and the practice of assigning districts to soldiers in lieu of pay — *iqṭāʿ*, on a foundation of older tax-farming — ran throughout the Buyid century. The Seljuks did not introduce this instrument. They found it running.

By 1055 the Buyid order had done what a co-optation whose grantees keep their swords always does. The line had split between Baghdad and Shīrāz within a generation; Daylamite infantry and Turkish cavalry inside one army had become permanent rival interests; the last amīr of Iraq held a fraction of what ʿAḍud al-Dawla had held; and the caliph had begun looking east.

The creed the powerless man wrote

Here is the fact that reorders the landscape, and the one the received account of 1055 omits.

While all of the above was true, the caliphs of Baghdad were rebuilding — on the one ground that cavalry cannot take.

Al-Qādir, raised to the caliphate in November 991 by the Buyid Bahā' al-Dawla to replace a predecessor who had shown signs of independence, reigned forty years and used them. In 402/1011 he convened an assembly of Sunni and Twelver scholars, several of them ʿAlids, which issued a manifesto declaring the Fatimid caliphs' claim of descent from ʿAlī fraudulent — an attack not on their armies, which were beyond reach, but on their title, which was not. In 408/1017–18 he required the Ḥanafī-Muʿtazilī jurists and judges of Baghdad to renounce Muʿtazilism and Rafiḍism publicly and forbade instruction in the proscribed doctrines; a further document followed in 409/1018–19 and three books in 420/1029. None of these texts survives. What survives is a summary of some seven hundred and seventy words which Adam Mez identified in Ibn al-Jawzī's *al-Muntaẓam*, itself complicated: recent work reads it as a version prepared under al-Qādir's son al-Qā'im for a different purpose — the reconciliation of Ḥanbalīs and Ashʿarīs, whom the caliph summoned to his palace and required to sign.

Read that against the office's material position and the logic is exact. A man with no army and no revenue, holding one leg of a tripod, spends forty years driving stakes into it: defining the creed, requiring subscription, denouncing the rival's genealogy, refusing to let the judgeship be sold. He is not a figurehead performing ceremony. He is an apex stripped of two monopolies, consolidating the third.

And he was not working against the current. George Makdisi's argument — contested but not dislodged — is that the return of Sunnism to dominance in Baghdad began roughly half a century before the Seljuks arrived and owed more to a rising class of Baghdadi traditionalists than to any later state patronage. That half-century is precisely al-Qādir's. **The Sunni revival the Seljuks are conventionally credited with sponsoring was already running when they got there, and the man who had done most to run it was the caliph they came to protect.**

A contract made out of necessity

Which brings us to the document.

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī, born at Basra in 974, chief *qāḍī* at Baghdad, repeatedly sent out as an envoy by al-Qā'im to the Buyid amīrs and eastward to the rising Turkish powers, wrote *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya*, the Ordinances of Government, in the middle of the eleventh century. He died in 450/1058. A Ḥanbalī contemporary, Abū Yaʿlā Ibn al-Farrā' (d. 458/1066), produced a parallel work under the same title; their relation is disputed, and the fact of two such books being written in one city in one decade is itself evidence of what the caliphal court was working on.

The book opens with the contract of the imamate. Then, in the third chapter, on the investiture of amīrs over territories, it divides the general amirate in two — the amirate of *istikfā'*, contracted from choice, and the amirate of *istīlā'*, contracted out of necessity — and defines the second:

وأما إمارة الاستيلاء التي تعقد عن اضطرار فهي أن يستولي الأمير بالقوة على بلاد يقلده الخليفة إمارتها ويفوض إليه تدبيرها وسياستها، فيكون الأمير باستيلائه مستبدا بالسياسة والتدبير، والخليفة بإذنه منفذا لأحكام الدين ليخرج من الفساد إلى الصحة ومن الحظر إلى الإباحة، وهذا وإن خرج عن عرف التقليد المطلق في شروطه وأحكامه ففيه من حفظ القوانين الشرعية وحراسة الأحكام الدينية ما لا يجوز أن يترك مختلا مخذولا ولا فاسدا معلولا

As for the amirate of seizure, which is contracted out of necessity: it is that the amīr seizes by force lands over which the caliph then invests him with the amirate and delegates to him their management and their governance — so that the amīr, by his seizure, is sole master of governance and management, and the caliph, by his authorisation, is the executor of the rulings of religion, that the matter may pass from corruption to soundness and from the forbidden to the permitted. And this, though it departs from the customary form of unrestricted investiture in its conditions and its rulings, yet contains such preservation of the laws of the sharīʿa and such guarding of the rulings of religion as may not be left disordered and abandoned.

Take it apart slowly, because it is one of the cleanest legal fictions in this collection.

The order of events in the world is seizure, then investiture. The order in the sentence is the same — *the amīr seizes by force lands over which the caliph then invests him* — which is remarkable candour, and is what makes the passage evidence rather than propaganda. But the grammar of authority runs the other way. The caliph is the subject of every verb that confers: he invests, he delegates, he authorises. The amīr is the subject of the verb that takes. And the clause doing the real work names what the

transaction converts: *li-yakhruja min al-fasād ilā al-ṣiḥḥa wa-min al-ḥaẓr ilā al-ibāḥa* — that it may pass from corruption to soundness, from the forbidden to the permitted. Nothing on the ground changes. The same man holds the same country with the same troops. What changes is its legal character, and the change is performed by a party with no means of resisting the seizure it is legalising.

Note also what the passage concedes and what it withholds. It concedes governance entirely: *mustabidd*, sole master, is not a weak word. It withholds the execution of the rulings of religion, explicitly, as the caliph's remaining function. **The chapter is a division of labour drafted by the weaker party, and the weaker party has kept the seam.**

Al-Māwardī was writing this while serving as the caliph's ambassador to the very amīrs it describes. Whether the Buyids read it is not the point. The point is that when a Turkish army arrived from the east with uncontested force and no title, there was a chapter in a book, by the chief judge of Baghdad, explaining exactly what such a man should ask for and exactly who could give it to him.

Bir tengri

The last order had not yet arrived, and had been Muslim for about two generations.

The Oghuz Turks of the Syr Darya basin enter the Arabic record most vividly through Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān, who crossed their country in 921–22 as secretary to an embassy from the caliph al-Muqtadir to the Volga Bulgars. His account of the Ghuzz is a Baghdadi jurist meeting steppe pastoralists and disliking nearly everything: they are nomads, they pitch where the grazing takes them, they do not pray, they do not wash, their women go unveiled, and their leaders are consulted rather than obeyed. He reports that a wronged man lifts his head and says *bir tengri*, one god, and is careful to gloss it. He records a political vocabulary too — a *yabghu* at the head of the confederation and a deputy beneath him — and an authority so unevenly acknowledged that a tribesman who stopped the embassy on the road told them exactly what he thought of the deputy.

That is the world the Seljuk family came out of. They belonged to the Qınıq, one of the twenty-four Oghuz tribes; their eponym Seljuq was son of a chief remembered as Duqāq, and the sources put father or son in the service of either the Oghuz *yabghu* or the Khazars. In the 980s Seljuq broke with his overlord, moved his people to Jand on the lower Syr Darya inside the Muslim frontier, and converted. Reported dates run from about 985 to about 992; he is said to have died at Jand around 1007–09.

His sons were called Mīkāʾīl, Isrāʾīl, Mūsā and Yūnus — Michael, Israel, Moses, Jonah — and possibly Yūsuf. The names have produced a long argument about what

the family was before it was Muslim, with Nestorian contact, Jewish contact through the Khazars, and simple onomastic borrowing all defended. This study takes no side. What matters is smaller and firmer: **the men who entered Baghdad in 1055 were the grandsons and great-grandsons of a convert.** The doctrine they arrived to defend was being assembled around them; their own family's relation to it was three generations deep.

From Jand they did what steppe war-bands with good cavalry do among competing settled dynasties: they hired out, serving Samanids against Qarakhanids and Qarakhanids against Ghaznavids and being fought by all three. Arslan Isrāʾīl was seized by Maḥmūd of Ghazna around 1025 and died in captivity. The remnant crossed the Oxus, was granted and then denied grazing, raided, was campaigned against, and on 23 May 1040 destroyed the Ghaznavid field army at Dandānaqān near Marw.

And here is the last thing the landscape must establish. The model the Seljuks stepped into was not the Buyid one. It was the **Ghaznavid** one. Maḥmūd of Ghazna, a Turkish slave-soldier's son ruling an empire the caliph could not have reached with a courier, had spent his reign buying Abbasid titles — *yamīn al-dawla* and the rest — from al-Qādir, and had been courted in turn by the Fatimids and by the caliph as a counterweight to the Buyids. The transaction of a distant sword purchasing a Baghdad signature was thirty years old and thoroughly proven before Tughril needed it.

Nor did Tughril wait for what he later accepted. He is reported to have had the *khuṭba* pronounced in his own name at Nishapur in 1038, two years before Dandānaqān and seventeen before Baghdad; the report reaches us through the Ghaznavid and Seljuk historiographical tradition and the exact titulature at that date is not confirmed here against dated coinage. But the shape is clear enough to carry a warning forward: when the caliph invested Tughril in 1058, he was not conferring a status the Seljuk lacked.

Reading the eve against the framework

On the recursion, with a correction. A conqueror never meets an aboriginal baseline, only an earlier build that took, and Iraq in 1055 is a stack of them — Sasanian administration under Arab conquest under Abbasid revolution. But this case forces a distinction the framework has not needed before. **Belief and doctrine naturalise on different schedules.** The population's Islam had naturalised: it was formed in childhood, held sacred, and defended without argument. The *content* of that Islam — which school, which theology, which credal formula, which men were authorised to say — had not naturalised at all, and was being fought over in the streets of Baghdad and Nishapur while the Seljuks were arriving. A study that reads deep belief as evidence of settled doctrine will misread the whole century. A study that reads unsettled doctrine as evidence of shallow belief will misread it in the opposite direction and get killed on a boat.

On the two-body picture. The received account treats sultan-and-caliph as a Seljuk arrangement inherited from the Buyids. The evidence does not support even that much. The office of *amīr al-umarā'* was created for Ibn Rā'iq in 936, and its holder's first act was to destroy the caliph's own guard; the Buyids received the arrangement in 945–46 as fully formed as the Seljuks received it in 1055. Any comparison that treats Buyid-versus-Seljuk as a controlled two-case test with confession as the operative variable is comparing the last two runs of a long series while calling them the first two.

And the contribution. The framework holds that legitimacy is borrowed rather than minted, and that the trusted-information position can be occupied, crowded or captured but never created or abolished. All of that assumes the party doing the acquiring holds, or is reaching for, force and revenue as well. This landscape shows the opposite manoeuvre.

An apex stripped of force and revenue but left in possession of the power to declare things lawful will begin manufacturing the legal instrument by which its own dispossession is made lawful — because that instrument is the only remaining thing it has to sell. Over sixty years the caliphs of Baghdad issued a creed and required subscription to it, denounced the rival caliphate's genealogy, refused to let the judgeship be sold, and had their chief judge draft a chapter defining precisely how a man who had seized a country by force could be made lawful. Each is a move on the one ground cavalry cannot take. The last is decisive, because it converts weakness into a monopoly: if seizure requires investiture to become lawful, the only party who can perform the investiture is indispensable to every future seizer, permanently, at no military cost.

Two corollaries, both testable in what follows. **The terms of legitimation can be drafted in advance of the man who will need them** — and where they are, a conqueror's apparent generosity in seeking investiture may be less a purchase than an acceptance of terms already written. And second: the chair a stranger walks into is not the same object when its occupant has spent sixty years advertising what sitting in it means.

A note on sources.

The one document quoted exactly is al-Māwardī's definition of *imārat al-istīlā'* from the third chapter of *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya*, in Arabic from a text of the printed edition with a translation of my own; the work is out of copyright and the modern English versions by Wafaa Wahba and Asadullah Yate are not used. Al-Māwardī's dates, his tenure as chief *qāḍī* and his employment as al-Qā'im's envoy are standard; his relation to Abū Ya'lā's parallel work is disputed and not relied on. The reading of the passage as a legal fiction, and the emphasis on the sequence of its verbs, are this study's; H. A. R. Gibb's older argument that the chapter served the usurper rather than the caliph is noted and partly resisted.

The Qādirī creed is quoted from nowhere, because none of the documents survives: two documents in 408/1017–18 and 409/1018–19 and three books in 420/1029, with a summary of some 770 words identified by Adam Mez in Ibn al-Jawzī. The Baghdad Manifesto of 402/1011 follows Shainool Jiwa's and Farhad Daftary's accounts. Makdisi's dating of the Sunni revival to the half-century before the Seljuks is his argument, contested since, and presented as a live position.

On the age of the population's Islam: Bulliet's conversion curve for Iran, with roughly eighty per cent converted by around 950 on urban and elite data, is followed with his own caveats, and Carlson's argument for a much slower Iraqi Islamisation is followed as a correction to it. On the newness of Sunnism as a bounded community with a settled orthodoxy, and on Abū Ḥanīfa's passage from excluded heretic to unimpeachable founder, Ahmad Khan's study is followed; the position that Sunnism in the "big tent" sense post-dates 1000 is current scholarship and is stated as such rather than as settled fact.

The political sequence — Ibn Rā'iq in 936 and the destruction of the Hujariyya; the Buyid entry of 19 December 945; the deposition and blinding of al-Mustakfī on 29 January 946, with 9 March in other accounts; Tuzun's blinding of al-Muttaqī in 944; the attempted farming of the chief judgeship between 961 and 963; al-Basāsīrī's cutting of al-Qā'im's stipend — rests on the chronicles as mediated by Hugh Kennedy's and John Donohue's work; where the chroniclers give the deposition a religious motive,

that motive is a later interpolation on Donohue's reading and is not adopted.

The Buyids' confessional allegiance is genuinely disputed and no argument here rests on resolving it. The ʻĀshūrāʼ order of 352/963 and the official form given to Ghadīr Khumm are reported by Ibn al-Jawzī among others; the Karkh disturbances of 959, 971 and 973 come through the same tradition and their figures should be read as impressions of scale.

The Sawād revenue figures are given deliberately as an order of magnitude: the Hārūn-era total from al-Jahshiyārī's list as amended by S. A. el-ʻAlī and used by Kennedy, the much lower later assessments discussed by Campopiano, with the two not directly commensurable and the dinar-dirham ratio differing between scholars. The connection of the fall to soil output follows Waines and Campopiano. The Nahrawān breach is dated 937/8 and attributed to Ibn Rāʼiq against Bajkam, with Kennedy's judgement on its representativeness adopted.

Ibn Faḍlān's *Risāla* is paraphrased rather than quoted, because the modern English translations by Frye, Lunde and Stone, and Montgomery are in copyright; only the two Turkic words he glosses are reproduced. The Seljuk genealogy, the flight to Jand and the conversion are given as the sources give them, with the conversion at roughly 985–992 and Seljuq's death at roughly 1007–09; the argument from his sons' biblical names is left open. Dandānaqān is dated 23 May 1040. The report of the *khuṭba* at Nishapur in 1038 is flagged as unconfirmed against coinage. A remark attributed to Tughril there, that the Seljuks were newcomers ignorant of Persian custom, circulates in secondary retellings citing Bayhaqī, has not been checked against a text reproducing the original, and is not quoted.

MODULE 1

A GATE OF IRON AND LOCKS OF COPPER

Module 1 · the floor of force — an army that could not be walled out, could not be held in place, and twice lost the capital because it was fighting itself

Hired against the men they were

The founding act of this order was not a battle. It was a licensing agreement, and it was signed by the party that lost.

Maḥmūd of Ghazna had taken the measure of the Turkmen early. When he seized Arslan Isrāʾīl, the eldest of Seljuq's sons, around 1025 and sent him into captivity in India, he kept him as a hostage for the good behaviour of his people, and settled a portion of those people inside Khurasan in dispersed groups on the reasoning that a tribe broken into fragments and planted among towns can be watched. The reasoning was sound and the result was not: within a few years the settled Turkmen were raiding across northern Persia and putting towns to ransom, and the Ghaznavid state discovered that it had converted an external threat into an internal one at the cost of a hostage.

After Maḥmūd's death in 1030 the remainder of the family — Tughril and Chaghrī, sons of Mīkāʾīl — moved through Khwārazm, were driven off by the Oghuz *yabghu*'s man Shāh Malik in 1035, and applied to Maḥmūd's son Masʿūd for asylum in Ghaznavid territory. Masʿūd, who thought them dangerous and was right, sent a punitive force against them near Nasā under his commander-in-chief Begtoghdi: on the figures reported, something on the order of fifteen thousand cavalry with two thousand palace *ghulāms*. It was beaten.

What followed is the single most instructive document of the founding, and it survives as a set of terms rather than a text. Masʿūd ceded to the Seljuks three places on his north-western march — Nasā, Farāwa and Dihistān — and in exchange the Seljuks recognised Ghaznavid authority and undertook to protect the region **against other Turkic tribes**.

Read the consideration and the whole subsequent history is visible in it. A settled empire, unable to catch a mobile enemy, hired that enemy to police the frontier against enemies of exactly its own kind, and paid in territory. A grant that purchases armed service from men who keep their swords is the most brittle bargain a government can make, and these grantees were nothing except their swords. The interval before the first breach was about two years. By 1037 the Seljuks had extracted Sarakhs, Abīvard and Marw from the same government; by 1038 they held Nishapur and Herat.

The founding legend, when it arrives, will describe men who came to restore the Sunni order. The founding transaction was a protection contract.

The army that could not be brought to battle

The military asymmetry is the technical heart of the module and it should be stated in plain mechanical terms, because everything downstream depends on it.

The Ghaznavid army was one of the most formidable in the Islamic world: a professional force of slave cavalry and infantry, with Indian war elephants, a siege train, and a baggage establishment to match. It could not be beaten in a set-piece engagement by nomads and it did not need to be. It needed to be *found*, and it needed to be supplied while it looked.

The Seljuk force was light horse-archers on grass-fed ponies, moving with their own flocks, without a baggage train because they were the baggage train. Peacock's account of the campaigns of the later 1030s makes the pattern explicit and it recurs in every engagement: where the Ghaznavids gained the upper hand, the Turkmen simply dissolved into the steppe and reformed. An army that can decline battle indefinitely and accept it only at a moment of its own choosing does not have to win often.

The decision came in the spring of 1040. Masʿūd marched from Sarakhs toward Marw across desert, and the Seljuks did to him precisely what their position permitted: they shadowed the column, cut its communications, and denied it the wells. The battle at Dandānaqān, a fortress in the desert between Marw and Sarakhs, ran over three days and ended on 8 Ramaḍān 431 — 23 May 1040 — with the Ghaznavid army broken and Masʿūd escaping toward Ghazna with a remnant.

The numbers must be given as ranges and read with suspicion. The Seljuk force is generally put at sixteen to twenty thousand horse. The Ghaznavid army is reported at up to fifty thousand men with a hundred to three hundred elephants; C. E. Bosworth doubts the higher figures, and the more interesting suggestion in the literature is that thirst, hunger and desertion had by the third day reduced Masʿūd's *effective* strength to something near parity with his enemy. Ibn al-Athīr's account has the Ghaznavids

initially driving the Seljuks off and then falling to quarrelling over the spoils, at which point Chaghrī returned and fell on a disordered army. Whether or not that detail is true, its shape is the shape of the whole campaign: the Ghaznavids were not out-fought, they were out-lasted, and then broken at the moment their own cohesion failed.

That is the founding act. Everything the Seljuks held for the next century and a half rests on one afternoon in a desert, won by an army that had never taken a fortified city by assault and would not need to.

A gate of iron and locks of copper

Which brings the module to the question that usually decides a conquest — what geography, what fortresses, what monopoly of weapons left a population unable to scatter — and to the discovery that in this case it runs backwards.

The Seljuks did not reduce cities. Marw came over in 1037, Nishapur and Herat in 1038, and the pattern in each was negotiation between the invaders and the urban notables, the *qāḍī* and the *raʾīs* and the leading families, conducted at the point where it had become clear that no field army was coming. A walled city in eleventh-century Khurasan or Iraq was not a fortress holding out against a besieger; it was a community whose notables were in the business of deciding, at intervals, whose name would be read in the Friday sermon. When the countryside was held by somebody the city could not evict, the notables performed the calculation their position handed them and opened the gates. Bayhaqī, the Ghaznavid bureaucrat whose loyalty to the vanquished dynasty makes his contempt for the newcomers a matter of record, notes their ragged and battered condition on entering Nishapur — which is a way of saying that a great city changed hands to men who did not look capable of taking it, because taking it was not the operation being performed.

Where the calculation went the other way, the record is more useful still. The clearest surviving account of a Seljuk assault is Armenian, and it comes from a hostile and contemporary witness: Aristakes Lastivertsi, writing between 1072 and 1079, on Alp Arslan's capture of Ani in 1064. Aristakes describes the sultan pitching his tent opposite the city and devising stratagems against — in Robert Bedrosian's rendering — that city gate of iron and those locks of copper; and describes him growing disheartened at the fortifications and preparing to withdraw. The walls held. What did not hold was the garrison. Aristakes attributes to God the discord and disunity and chaos he says fell between the guards and the princes, and reports that the defenders broke off fighting and fled, at which point the attackers came over the wall. His judgement on what followed is one line, and one line is all this study will take from him: "Putting the

Persian sword to work, they spared no one."

Hold the two halves of that account together, because together they are the module's structural finding. **The fortification was never the variable. The cohesion of the men behind it was.** Ani's walls defeated Alp Arslan; Ani's garrison did not. And the same is true at Dandānaqān, where an army that could not be beaten was beaten once it fell to quarrelling, and true at Nishapur, where the walls were irrelevant the moment the notables did their arithmetic.

So the usual enquiry — who was disarmed, who was made unable to flee, what geography closed the exits — returns a strange result here, and the strangeness is worth stating rather than smoothing. The settled populations of Khurasan, Jibāl and Iraq were not made capturable by anything the Seljuks did. **They were capturable already, and permanently, by the ordinary condition of being sedentary**: they had fields that could not be moved, cities that could not be dispersed, and irrigation works that made flight ruinous. What the Seljuks brought was not an instrument of capture but an instrument that could not itself be captured — an army with no fixed point to strike, no baggage to burn, no city to besiege and no province whose devastation would compel it to give battle. Their hold on this country is defined less by what it could impose than by what could not be imposed upon it.

Four hundred horsemen

Then the same property produced the opposite result, twice, and within five years of the conquest's greatest success.

Tughril entered Baghdad in December 1055. There was no battle. The *khuṭba* was read in his name on 15 December, the Buyid amīr al-Malik al-Raḥīm was taken, and the city changed hands as Nishapur had. What the Seljuks brought to Iraq was, on any reading, a very small force in relation to the space it was now responsible for — and Iraq was full of parties who had not been consulted.

Arslān al-Basāsīrī was one of them: a Turkish freedman of the Buyid house, a general who had been the effective military power in Baghdad before the Seljuks arrived, and a man who had already demonstrated the material condition of the caliphate by cutting off al-Qā'im's stipend in the course of a quarrel with his vizier. Displaced in 1055, he took service with the Fatimids of Cairo, was made their viceroy in Iraq, and began working the ground with subsidies from Egypt and alliances among the Arab tribal amīrs of the Jazīra, principally Quraysh ibn Badrān of the ʿUqaylids.

In early 1058 Tughril's half-brother Ibrāhīm Yinal came to an arrangement with al-Basāsīrī and the Fatimid chief missionary al-Mu'ayyad: Yinal would take his brother's

throne, and would have the Fatimid caliph's name proclaimed in the *khuṭba*. Yinal then rose in the Jibāl, Tughril marched to deal with him, and Iraq was left effectively bare of Seljuk troops.

The consequence is the fact that ought to govern every later description of the Seljuk floor. In the last days of December 1058 al-Basāsīrī moved on Baghdad. The forces reported are of the order of four hundred *mamlūk* cavalry of his own and two hundred horsemen of Quraysh's — figures which, like all figures in this period, should be treated as indications of scale rather than musters, but which no source inflates into anything resembling an army. He crossed the Tigris in the first days of January 1059, cleared the remaining Seljuk garrisons out of eastern Baghdad, and sacked the caliphal palace. On Friday 22 January the sermon in Baghdad named not al-Qā'im but the Fatimid al-Mustanṣir. The caliphal vizier Ibn al-Muslima was surrendered and put to death; the chief *qāḍī* al-Dāmighānī bought his freedom; the caliph himself was removed from the city and held at Ḥadītha under the custody of the ʿUqaylid Muḥārish. The Fatimid *khuṭba* was read in Baghdad, Wāsiṭ, Basra and elsewhere in Iraq for something close to forty Fridays. In Cairo a palace was prepared for the Abbasid caliph who never arrived.

Tughril, having killed his brother — Yinal was defeated near Rayy, taken by Alp Arslan and strangled with a bowstring on the day he was handed over, his nephews executed with him — turned back. Al-Basāsīrī abandoned Baghdad on 14 December 1059; Tughril and the restored caliph entered on 4 January 1060; and in the same month Tughril's general Khumārtagīn brought al-Basāsīrī to battle near Kufa and killed him.

Six hundred horsemen took the seat of the Sunni caliphate and held it for a year, because the sultan was three hundred miles away fighting his own brother. That is the honest measure of Seljuk force at the height of the conquest, and no account of the Seljuk restoration of Sunnism should be written without it. It also explains, without any appeal to piety, why such men should have wanted a caliph's signature: a sword that could lose Baghdad to four hundred *mamlūks* had every material reason to want a title that could be honoured in places its cavalry could not reach.

The grazing was bad

The other half of the same property was the Turkmen themselves, and here the received account — that the tribesmen were exported west as a deliberate solution to a domestic problem — turns out to be half right in a way that is more interesting than the whole.

The Turkmen were not a standing army. They were households with flocks who fought, and their loyalty ran to the pasture as much as to the family that led them. Iraq is marsh and desert and irrigated field; it has almost nothing a Central Asian pastoralist recognises as grazing. Peacock's reading of the sources on Ibrāhīm Yinal's rebellion is that this was the substance of the grievance: the Turkmen found the country Tughril had brought them to unbearable for their flocks, blamed him for it, and attached themselves to a rival who would take them out of it. They are reported to have extracted from Yinal a guarantee that there would be neither a return to Iraq nor a peace with his brother — a mutiny that had closed its own exits before it began.

So the conquest army revolted against the conquest. Not over pay, not over doctrine, not over the succession as such, but because the empire they had won had no grass in it. And the revolt cost the dynasty the capital for a year.

That is the pressure the Turkmen constituted, and it is why the westward movement is best read not as a policy of disposal but as the discovery of a place where the army and the country fitted each other. Anatolia and the Caucasus have upland pasture; they were held by Christian powers, which made raiding there lawful and even meritorious; and they were far from Isfahan. Raids into Byzantine territory had been running since the 1040s, before any Seljuk needed a valve for anything. Alp Arslan's campaign of 1064 into Armenia and Georgia — the campaign that took Ani — opened the ground formally, and by 1069 raiders had reached as far west as Konya. Aristakes was writing about the consequence within a decade of watching it.

But the framing must be kept honest at both ends. This was permission and encouragement more than direction; the Turkmen were not deployed, they were let go where they wanted to go, and the sultans took the credit for a movement they could not have stopped. And Alp Arslan's own strategic attention in 1070–71 was on Syria and the Fatimids, not on Anatolia; his operations on the Byzantine march look like an attempt to bring an unruly frontier under control before turning south, and he offered Romanos terms before Manzikert rather than seeking the battle. **Sending a surplus of armed men outward describes what happened, but the outlet was found rather than designed, and crediting the sultans with a policy flatters them with a foresight the evidence does not supply.**

Manzikert itself, on 26 August 1071, needs the same discipline. The numbers are irrecoverable: modern estimates put the Byzantine field army at something like forty thousand with roughly half of it detached under Tarchaneiotes and never engaged, and the Seljuk force somewhere between thirty-five and fifty thousand, while Matthew of Edessa and the Muslim chroniclers offer figures above two hundred thousand that nobody now defends. Romanos was captured and released within a week on terms.

What destroyed Byzantine Anatolia was not the battle but what followed it: Romanos blinded by his rivals on his return, and a civil war that emptied the interior of any force capable of resisting the migration already under way. Manzikert exposed the frailty; it did not create it. A study that makes it the hinge of the century will have imported the nineteenth-century version of the story.

Bought men

The last element of Seljuk military power is the one that shows the dynasty had understood its own problem, and it appears remarkably early.

Free tribesmen who revolt over pasture cannot be the basis of an imperial army. Slave soldiers can: purchased as boys, converted, trained, quartered, paid in cash, without tribe, without pasture and without a rival lineage to attach themselves to. The institution was not a Seljuk invention — the Abbasids had built it at Samarra, the Ghaznavids were its product, al-Basāsīrī was one — and the Seljuks took it up almost immediately. David Ayalon's study of the Seljuk *mamlūks* draws attention to Alp Arslan's expedition into the Khazar lands in 456/1064, which is reported to have brought back very large numbers of them, and places it precisely: after the liquidation of al-Basāsīrī, before Manzikert, in the years when the dynasty was converting a tribal confederation into a state.

The clearest single image of the substitution is the succession war of 1073. Alp Arslan died in 1072 and his son Malik-Shāh, about seventeen, was challenged by his uncle Qāvurt of Kirman, who argued that a brother's claim preceded a son's — the steppe conception of the realm against the dynastic one, in its first open appearance. Qāvurt's army was Turkmen cavalry. Malik-Shāh's, assembled on Nizām al-Mulk's advice, was *ghulāms*, Kurds and Arabs. The nephew won, and had his uncle killed.

Within thirty-three years of Dandānaqān, then, the dynasty that had come to power on free Turkmen horse was fighting Turkmen horse with bought men. Recruiting the fighting core from outside the population that could otherwise supply a rival is the oldest defence there is against a rival of one's own blood, and here it arrived not as a considered answer to that danger but as a solution to a logistical one, and arrived fast. What can be said at this stage is that Seljuk armed force was never a single thing: it was two armies with incompatible interests, one of which had won the empire and the other of which was bought to hold it.

Reading the floor against the framework

On capturability. The usual question is what geography, what fortresses, what monopoly of weapons made the governed unable to disperse. This case answers it and then inverts it. The governed were capturable by the ordinary fact of being sedentary, and no instrument was required; the walls of Ani and Nishapur were never the operative variable, since the first fell when its garrison quarrelled and the second opened when its notables calculated. What the conqueror supplied was not capture but *incapturability* — an army with no fixed point, no baggage, no city and no province whose devastation could force it to stand.

From which the finding, and it is a genuine addition:

Where a conqueror's military advantage is mobility rather than mass, his hold on a country is uncommonly cheap to establish and uncommonly hard to keep — because the property that makes his army uncatchable also makes it unquarterable, unpayable in the coin the conquered country produces, and indifferent to the country it has taken. A heavy army can be garrisoned in the province it conquered and fed from its taxes; a pastoral army must be pastured, and if the conquest has no pasture the army is a standing grievance against its own victory. Dandānaqān and the revolt of Ibrāhīm Yinal are the two faces of one fact, nineteen years apart. And the predicted consequence, which this case supplies on schedule, is that such a conqueror will begin buying a second army almost at once — so that purchased soldiers should be looked for early in any conquest of irrigated agriculture by pastoralists, not as a chosen defence against a rival of the conqueror's own blood but as the only available way to convert a raid into a state.

On what this adds to what the eve of the conquest already showed. The caliphs of Baghdad, having lost their soldiers and their revenue and retaining only the power to declare a thing lawful, had spent sixty years driving stakes into that one remaining ground — issuing a creed and requiring subscription to it, denouncing the rival caliphate's genealogy, refusing to let the judgeship be sold, and finally having their chief judge set out in writing exactly how a man who had seized a country by force could be invested with it. The terms of legitimation were drafted before the man who would need them arrived. What this module supplies is the reason he wanted them. A sword that takes a capital without a battle can lose it without a battle, and did, to six hundred horsemen, for forty Fridays, while its owner was away killing his brother. Seljuk arms never produced the surplus of force that makes legitimation optional. **What these men did, as against what was later said about them, reads cleanly without any appeal to piety: they paid for the caliph's signature because the signature was current in places their cavalry could not be, and because their cavalry could not be in two**

places at once.

And a caution this case makes visible where longer-lived orders hide it. It is a sound general rule that heavy surveillance betrays a belief that never took, and that the absence of visible coercion measures the presence of one. In the first two decades of Seljuk rule there is almost no suppression apparatus in the record — no political police, no register of suspects, no machinery of watching. It would be a serious error to read that as consent. There was no apparatus of any kind: no standing provincial administration the dynasty had built, no garrisons it had placed, no revenue it had assessed. **An order can be cheap because it is believed and cheap because it has not yet been assembled, and for the first generation the two are indistinguishable in the record.** The test is not the absence of the machinery but whether anything else the state was doing would have required machinery — and in these years almost nothing did, because almost nothing was being done.

A note on sources.

One primary text is quoted, in one line: Aristakes Lastivertsi on the fall of Ani in 1064, in Robert Bedrosian's English translation from Classical Armenian, freely available in his Armenian historical sources series. Aristakes was an Armenian cleric writing between about 1072 and 1079, within a decade of the events, and his *History Regarding the Sufferings Occasioned by Foreign Peoples Living Around Us* is hostile testimony of a particular kind — he reads the disasters of his century as divine punishment for Armenian sinfulness, says as much of Ani itself, and his account of the garrison's collapse is framed as God implanting discord among the defenders. The structural detail this module takes from him — that the walls held and the men behind them did not — survives the framing, since a writer disposed to blame his own side has no motive to invent the fortifications' adequacy.

Bayhaqī's *Ta'rīkh-i Mas'ūdī* is the near-contemporary narrative spine for the Khurasan campaigns and is the testimony of a Ghaznavid bureaucrat writing after his dynasty's defeat, with a settled Persianate administrator's contempt for Turkic nomads; his details are used here for the shape of events and for his notice of the Seljuks' condition on entering Nishapur, and not for his judgements. A remark widely attributed to Tughril at Nishapur — that the Seljuks were newcomers and strangers ignorant of Persian custom — circulates in secondary retellings citing Bayhaqī, has not been checked here against a text reproducing the original, and is therefore neither quoted nor relied on.

All army figures in this module are ranges and several are little better than impressions. Dandānaqān: Seljuk strength is generally put at sixteen to twenty

thousand horse and the Ghaznavid at anything from sixteen to fifty thousand with a hundred to three hundred elephants, with C. E. Bosworth doubting the higher end and the suggestion in the literature that attrition had brought Masʿūd's effective force near parity by the third day. The Begtoghdi expedition of 1035 is reported at about fifteen thousand cavalry with two thousand palace *ghulāms*. Al-Basāsīrī's force at Baghdad is given as roughly four hundred *mamlūk* cavalry with two hundred ʿUqaylid horsemen; Ibn al-Athīr elsewhere describes a body of two thousand of his cavalry as Turks. Manzikert is the worst case: modern estimates of about forty thousand Byzantines, close to half detached and never engaged, against thirty-five to fifty thousand Seljuks are reconstructions, and the two hundred thousand and more of Matthew of Edessa and the Muslim chroniclers is not used. Casualty figures for Ani, including the fifty thousand prisoners sometimes reported, are not used.

Dates followed here: the Nasā engagement and the cession of Nasā, Farāwa and Dihistān in 1035; Marw 1037; Nishapur and Herat 1038; Dandānaqān on 8 Ramaḍān 431 / 23 May 1040; the *khuṭba* for Tughril in Baghdad on 15 December 1055; al-Basāsīrī's entry into Baghdad at the turn of 1058–59 with the Fatimid *khuṭba* first read on Friday 22 January 1059 and continuing about forty Fridays; al-Basāsīrī's withdrawal on 14 December 1059 and Tughril's entry with the caliph on 4 January 1060; al-Basāsīrī killed near Kufa in Dhū al-Ḥijja 451 / January 1060; Ani 1064; Manzikert 26 August 1071; Alp Arslan's death 1072 and the defeat of Qāvurt in 1073.

The reading of the Seljuk military advantage as mobility rather than mass, and of the Turkmen dissolving into the steppe when pressed, follows A. C. S. Peacock's work, as does the account of Ibrāhīm Yinal's rebellion as driven by Turkmen discontent with Iraqi pasture; the inference drawn here — that the conquest army revolted against the conquest — is this study's. The early and deliberate Seljuk turn to purchased *mamlūks*, and the significance of Alp Arslan's Khazar expedition of 456/1064, follow David Ayalon. The composition of Malik-Shāh's army against Qāvurt is reported as *ghulāms*, Kurds and Arabs against Qāvurt's Turkmen; the contrast is in the sources, the use made of it here is not. Judgements on Manzikert's limited decisiveness, and on the Byzantine civil war following Romanos's blinding as the operative cause of the loss of Anatolia, represent the current weight of scholarly opinion rather than a settled consensus, and Carole Hillenbrand's study of the battle's afterlife as myth is the reason for stating the caution at all.

MODULE 2

NOT BY GRANT, NOR BY SALE, NOR BY GIFT

Module 2 · the settlement — what a conquering army can be paid in when the law forbids giving it the ground

The ground could not be given

Every conquest has to answer the same question within a few years of winning, and the answer is the order's spine: what do the men who did the fighting get, in what form, and can it be taken back.

The usual account of what the Seljuks did has them systematising a grant of land to their commanders in return for military service — an arrangement which, being described in a borrowed vocabulary, has been read for a century and a half as the arrival of something like a fief. That reading fails at the first legal fact, and the legal fact is available in a book written in Baghdad in the decade the Seljuks arrived, by the chief judge of the city, in a chapter devoted to nothing else.

> The seventeenth chapter of al-Māwardī's *Ordinances of Government* opens by dividing the whole institution in two. A grant by the ruler, he says, is confined to what he may lawfully dispose of and where his orders run, and is not valid in anything whose owner is identified and whose claimant is distinct; and it is of two kinds — إقطاع تمليك, a grant of ownership, and إقطاع استغلال, a grant of yield.

He then works through cultivated land, and comes to the class that matters most, the land taken in the conquests and set aside for the treasury. His account of how that happened is worth having in full because it is the memory of the arrangement, held by the institution that made it, four centuries on. ʿUmar, he writes, set aside from the land of the Sawād the properties of Chosroes and his household and whatever land its owners had abandoned or died holding; the yield came to nine million dirhams, which

he spent on the common purposes of the Muslims, and he granted away none of it. ʿUthmān afterwards granted it out, judging the yield greater under grantees than lying idle, and stipulating that the *fay'* due be taken from the man he granted it to — so that what he did was a lease-grant and not a grant of ownership — and the yield rose, it is said, to fifty million dirhams. His successors passed it on. And then:

فلما كان عام الجماجم سنة اثنتين وثمانين في فتنة ابن الأشعث أحرق الديوان وأخذ كل قوم ما يليهم

And when the year of al-Jamājim came, the year eighty-two, in the sedition of Ibn al-Ashʿath, the register was burned and each group took what lay next to them.

Then the ruling itself, and it is the sentence the whole module turns on:

فهذا النوع من العامر لا يجوز إقطاع رقبته ; لأنه قد صار باصطفائه لبيت المال ملكا لكافة المسلمين فجرى على رقبته حكم الوقوف المؤبدة ، وصار استغلاله هو المال الموضوع في حقوقه

This kind of cultivated land — the freehold of it may not be granted, because by its being set aside for the treasury it has become the property of the Muslims at large, so that the ruling of perpetual endowments applies to its freehold; and its yield became the money assigned to its lawful purposes.

And, of tax-paying land generally:

فتمليك الوقف لا يصح بإقطاع ولا بيع ولا هبة

The transfer of ownership of an endowment is not valid by grant, nor by sale, nor by gift.

There is the constraint, stated by a judge in the caliph's service, in the years when Tughril was taking Iraq. **The soil of the richest provinces of the empire the Seljuks had just won was not theirs to give.** It had been frozen in the seventh century by a decision not to divide the conquest among the conquerors, and the freeze had hardened into a rule of law that a sultan could no more repeal than he could repeal the prohibition on wine. What remained available to grant was the yield: a number, assessed on a district, payable to a named man for a period.

Three things follow from this at once, and they run through everything below.

The first is that the shape of the Seljuk settlement was not chosen. It was inherited as a legal constraint from a conquest four hundred years older, and the men who inherited

it had, as recent converts of three generations' standing, no standing whatever to argue with it.

The second is that the constraint had a demonstrated failure mode, and al-Māwardī had just narrated it. In the year 82 the register burned and every group took what lay nearest them. That is what happens to an entitlement that exists only as an entry in a book when the book is gone — which makes the register, not the land, the thing the settlement actually rests on.

The third is that the question worth asking about this order is therefore not *what were the soldiers given* — the law had already answered that — but *could the government still find the district, count what came out of it, and take the assignment back.*

What a stream is, and a field is not

The instrument was the *iqṭāʿ*, and the first task is to take the borrowed word off it.

Claude Cahen, whose 1953 study remains the point of departure for the whole subject, described the *iqṭāʿ* as an administrative concession whose nature varied by time and place and which has too often been rendered by the European word *fief* — a translation that has misled Western historians and, following them, Eastern ones. The warning is not pedantry. Four differences do real work.

The grantee did not receive the soil. He received an assignment on a revenue: the assessed land tax of a named district, which he collected and kept in place of a salary, meeting his own expenses and those of the troops he was required to maintain out of it. The freehold stayed where the law had put it.

He acquired no jurisdiction over the persons of the cultivators. His claim was against the assessment, and it ended when the assessment was met. This is not a modern gloss: it is the express content of the eleventh-century administrative literature, which insists that the assignee has no demand upon the subjects' persons, wealth, families, lands or goods beyond the tax he is entitled to collect in the proper manner, and that a subject who is oppressed may take his complaint to the ruler and must not be prevented from doing so.

No contract of homage bound the two parties. There was no ceremony of fealty creating a personal bond with mutual obligations enforceable on both sides; there was a document of assignment, issued by an office, recording a figure.

And it was, in principle, neither for life nor heritable. The assignment could be enlarged, reduced, moved to another district or cancelled outright, and it was expected to be, because the government's whole interest lay in keeping the paper live.

That last point is where the seed's expectation — that the Seljuks paid in land where an earlier Islamic conquest had paid in cancellable claims, and so produced the

medieval failure — falls apart. **They also paid in cancellable claims.** The doctrine permitted nothing else. The two settlements, four centuries apart, are not opposites; they are the same draw made twice, because the menu of lawful payments had one item on it.

Nor was the instrument new. Ann Lambton's judgement — against Cahen's earlier formulation that the Seljuks introduced a feudal order into the Islamic world — is that what prevailed was the legacy of the Buyids, not of the Seljuks; the Daylamite regime in Iraq had been paying soldiers in revenue assignments for a century before Tughril arrived, on a foundation of older tax-farming that goes back further still. Nizām al-Mulk did not invent the *iqṭāʿ*. He extended and regularised an instrument he found running, over a far larger territory than the men who had been running it ever held.

Transferred after three or four years

The clearest statement of how the assignment was supposed to work comes from a Persian mirror for princes produced at the Seljuk court around 1091–92 and attributed to Nizām al-Mulk. Its attribution is a live scholarly dispute — the text has been argued to be a later compilation put together under his name — and this study therefore treats it throughout as evidence of what a Seljuk court wanted the vizierate to look like, and never as the vizier's testimony about his own achievements.

Read that way it is extremely useful, because a court's prescriptions are a map of its anxieties.

The chapter on assignees insists on four things. They have no claim on the subjects beyond the tax lawfully assigned to them. Once it is collected, the subjects are to be secure in their persons, property, wives, children, lands and goods. Any subject who wishes to bring his case to the ruler must not be prevented. And — the sentence with the most information in it — the collectors and assignees should be moved on after three or four years, so that they do not become too strong.

Every one of those is a prohibition, and a prohibition is a description of what people are doing. Nobody legislates against a thing that is not happening. Set the four together and the picture is of assignees who were extracting beyond their assessment, treating the cultivators as their own, blocking appeals to the centre, and above all **sitting still**. The remedy the text proposes — rotate them before they take root — is the correct remedy and the one every such state proposes, and it is expensive, because to rotate a man you must know what he is holding, be able to replace him, and be able to make the replacement stick.

Which returns the module to its real variable. The legal form of the assignment never changed across the whole Seljuk period: it remained, on paper, a revocable charge

on a revenue. What changed was the government's ability to act on the paper. Under Malik-Shāh, with a functioning chancery at Isfahan, an audited account of what a district owed, and an army that could arrive, a revocable assignment is a salary with a delivery mechanism. After 1092, with the succession contested, the chancery's writ shortened, and the auditor unable to travel safely, the identical document becomes something the holder can treat as his own — not because the law was amended but because nobody came.

A grant is only as cancellable as the state's reach on the day the cancellation is attempted. That is the sentence that ought to replace "the Seljuks introduced feudalism," and it is testable: the sign of the settlement's decay is not a change in the wording of assignments but the disappearance of transfers, audits and remittances of surplus to the centre.

The men who won it got nothing

The settlement's largest omission is easy to miss because the omitted party appears in no register.

The free Turkmen who beat the Ghaznavids in the desert in 1040 were not, and could not be, assignees. An assignment is a share of an agricultural tax, collected through a chain of local officials, recorded in a book, paid to a named man who lives near enough to receive it. The Turkmen were households with flocks. They did not live near enough to anything; they had no use for a claim on a wheat assessment; and the settled districts of Iraq and Jibāl had no grazing to spare for them in any case.

So they received what such men receive: permission. Pasture where they could take it and hold it, plunder where the sultan sanctioned a raid, and after 1064 an open road westward into Armenian and Anatolian upland where the grass was good and the fighting was lawful. There is no document to quote, because a permission leaves no document. That silence is the evidence.

The consequence was recorded within twenty years of Dandānaqān. When Ibrāhīm Yinal raised his revolt against his half-brother, the sources report the Turkmen grievance in almost domestic terms — the country Tughril had brought them to was unbearable for their flocks and they blamed him for it — and they attached themselves to a rival on the express condition that he would not take them back to Iraq and would not make peace. An army that had won an empire and been given no part of it rose against the man who had won it, over grazing.

Hold that beside the assignments going to the commanders and the shape of the whole settlement is visible. **The men whose horses had taken the empire were paid**

in the right to go somewhere else, while the men who could be written into a register were paid out of it. That divergence, more than any doctrinal question, is what produced two armies inside one state — and it explains, without anyone needing to have been far-sighted, why the dynasty began purchasing slave cavalry so quickly. Bought men can be quartered where the revenue is. That is the whole advantage.

The whole family owned the whole thing

The other great division was made before Baghdad and it was never repaired.

After Dandānaqān the victors partitioned what they had taken and what they had not yet taken: Chaghrī received Greater Khurasan, Mūsā Yabghu received Herat, and Tughril took the unconquered west. That is not a delegation of provinces to governors. It is a division of a patrimony among brothers, on the steppe understanding that sovereignty inheres in the ruling lineage as a body, that every adult male of it holds a real share, and that the senior man is the first among them rather than their sovereign.

The Persian and Arabic chanceries the Seljuks employed understood rule the other way, as an office descending from a father to a designated son, and the two conceptions were never reconciled — only alternated between, according to who had the larger army at the moment of a death. The clearest statement of the older view is the argument Qāvurt of Kirman made in 1073 against his nephew Malik-Shāh: a brother's claim precedes a son's. He lost, and was killed, and the argument did not die with him, because it was not eccentric. It was the constitution the family had actually operated under since 1040.

This is the settlement's deepest fiction and its most expensive one, and it should be named for what it is rather than treated as a Turkish peculiarity. Every share-holding kinsman is a lawful claimant to the whole; therefore every succession is a war; therefore the empire's assets — the assignments, the offices, the armies — become the stakes in a family dispute at intervals of a generation. The arrangement bought the dynasty its cohesion during the conquest, when there was more to take than to quarrel over. It presented the bill in 1092.

One hundred thousand dinars

The last party to the settlement is the one with nothing to bring but a signature, and the traffic between the two houses is the most legible ledger in the case.

The caliph's first recorded communication with Tughril, in 429/1037, was a message asking him to stop destroying the cities he was taking and to stop mistreating

the caliph's subjects. Eighteen years later Tughril entered Baghdad. What the caliphate received from the arrangement was concrete and considerable: the Buyid regime removed, the stipend secure, the Fatimid claimant driven back out of the city after his year of Friday sermons, and a protector whose creed matched its own. What it paid was rank.

In 1056, immediately after the conquest, Tughril arranged the marriage of his brother Chaghrī's daughter Khadīja Arslān Khātūn to the caliph al-Qā'im; she bore him a son. That direction of traffic is the ordinary one, and the caliph gained by it. Then in 1061 Tughril sent the judge of Rayy to Baghdad to ask for the caliph's own daughter, Sayyida, for himself — and the sources are clear that al-Qā'im did not want it. The contract was concluded outside Tabriz in August or September 1062, with a marriage portion put at a hundred thousand dinars; she was brought to the sultan's palace in the spring of 1063. Tughril died that October. Alp Arslan sent her back to Baghdad the following year.

The distribution of the marriage payment survives in the scholarship — ten thousand for the caliph, ten thousand for his wife, and so on down — and a settlement rarely leaves so exact a receipt. A conqueror who had to be asked to stop sacking cities in 1037 was, twenty-five years later, buying a daughter of the Prophet's family's house over her father's objection, at a price, with the price itemised by recipient.

The traffic did not stop. Alp Arslan's daughter married the caliph's grandson and successor in 1071; Malik-Shāh's daughter married the same caliph in the 1080s, making him both the sultan's brother-in-law and his son-in-law. Marriage was the one currency the caliphate had that the sultans wanted and that the law did not restrict, and it was spent steadily for forty years.

What the caliph got out of the settlement, then, was restoration, protection and a stipend; what he paid was daughters, a signature, and the public admission that a man who had taken a country by force held it lawfully. Whether that was a bad bargain is a question Module 9 will have to take up, since the office that made it was, sixty years later, fielding an army of its own.

Reading the settlement against the framework

The finding, and it corrects an expectation this study carried in. The framework's usual question about a conquest settlement is what the conqueror chose to grant and on what terms, on the assumption that the choice was his. Here it was not. The soil of the empire's richest provinces had been placed beyond alienation in the seventh century by the decision not to divide the conquest among the conquerors, and by the eleventh that decision was a rule of law which the chief judge of Baghdad could state flatly — an endowment's ownership passes by no grant, no sale and no gift — and which a dynasty of recent converts had no standing to unmake.

So the settlement was constrained before it was designed, and the constraint came from the doctrine the conquerors had adopted. That is worth stating plainly because this collection has generally treated a borrowed doctrine as an asset: something a conqueror puts on to make his force cheap. **A borrowed doctrine is also a set of binding restrictions on how he may pay his own army — and here it restricted him in the direction of a weaker aristocracy and a stronger centre, which is the opposite of what a conqueror short of cash would have chosen.** The robe came with a bill, and the bill was payable in administrative effort: to pay soldiers in assessments rather than acres you must maintain a survey, a chancery, an audit and a courier service, permanently, or the assessments stop meaning anything.

Which yields the variable that actually separates one revenue-assignment settlement from another, and it is not the wording of the grant. Both this conquest and the Umayyad one paid their armies in cancellable claims, because nothing else was lawful. What differed was whether the granting state could still perform the cancellation it had reserved to itself. A revocable assignment in a state that can send an auditor and replace a holder is a salary. The identical document in a state that cannot is a freehold in everything but the wording, and the holder's heirs will simply remain. The decay of this settlement after 1092 involved no change to the law of *iqṭāʿ* whatsoever; it involved the chancery at Isfahan losing the ability to reach the district. **Read a settlement's legal terms without measuring the granting state's administrative reach and the prediction will be wrong every time.**

The proof that this was understood at the time is that the court was legislating against it. A text produced at that court around 1091–92 tells assignees they have no claim on the subjects beyond the assessment, tells them not to obstruct appeals to the ruler, and tells the government to move them on every three or four years so they do not grow strong. Prescriptions are confessions. And al-Māwardī had supplied the precedent forty years earlier without drawing the moral: at Dayr al-Jamājim the register burned, and each group took what lay next to them. **In a settlement made of entries**

rather than acres, the register is the settlement, and whoever cannot maintain the register has already made the grants permanent.

A last observation, which compounds rather than competes. The conquering army and the recorded beneficiaries of the conquest were not the same people. The Turkmen who won Dandānaqān could not be written into a revenue register — their wealth walked, their residence moved, and the districts they had taken had no grass — so they were paid in permission, and within twenty years they revolted over pasture and cost the dynasty its capital for a year. **Where a settlement's instrument is incapable of paying the men who did the fighting, the conquest generates its own second army before it generates its own second generation**: bought slave cavalry, quartered where the revenue is, purchased precisely because they can be paid in the only currency the law allows.

A note on sources.

Two passages of al-Māwardī's *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya* are quoted exactly in Arabic from the seventeenth chapter, on the rules of *iqṭāʿ*, with translations of my own; the modern English versions by Wafaa Wahba and Asadullah Yate are not used. The division into *iqṭāʿ tamlīk* and *iqṭāʿ istighlāl*, the narrative of ʿUmar's setting aside of the Sawād lands and ʿUthmān's lease-grant of them, the burning of the register at Dayr al-Jamājim in the year 82, and the ruling that the freehold of such land falls under the rule of perpetual endowments are all in that chapter. The figures al-Māwardī reports — a yield of nine million dirhams under ʿUmar rising to a reported fifty million after ʿUthmān's grants — are his, are given by him with the qualification *ʿalā mā qīla*, "as it is said," for the second, and are reproduced here as the institution's own memory of the arrangement rather than as accounting. His parallel and near-contemporary, the Ḥanbalī Abū Yaʿlā Ibn al-Farrāʾ (d. 458/1066), wrote a work of the same title whose relation to this one is disputed and is not relied on here.

The Persian mirror for princes conventionally attributed to Nizām al-Mulk, and dated to about 1091–92, is used throughout as a court text of that decade and never as the vizier's own testimony. The attribution has been contested since Boris Zakhoder's work of 1949 and has more recently been argued by Alexey Khismatulin to be a false ascription; Neguin Yavari defends the traditional attribution on manuscript and citation grounds. The dispute is unresolved, and nothing in this module depends on resolving it, since the argument made here is about what a court found it necessary to prescribe. The passage on assignees is paraphrased from the standard renderings rather than quoted, and its four provisions — no claim beyond the lawful assessment, security of the subjects thereafter, unobstructed appeal to the ruler, and transfer of collectors

and assignees after three or four years — are consistently reported across them.

On the nature of the *iqṭāʿ*, the position taken here follows Claude Cahen's insistence that the word should not be rendered as *fief* and that the grantee received a revenue assignment rather than the soil, held no jurisdiction over the cultivators' persons, entered no contract of homage, and held in principle neither for life nor heritably. Ann Lambton's judgement that the operative system was a Buyid legacy rather than a Seljuk innovation is followed against Cahen's earlier and more sweeping formulation about feudalism entering the Islamic world with the Seljuks. The inference drawn in this module — that the constraint originated in the law of endowed conquest land and therefore was not a Seljuk policy choice at all — is this study's, and rests on the al-Māwardī chapter rather than on either scholar.

The partition of 1040 between Chaghrī in Khurasan, Mūsā Yabghu at Herat and Tughril in the west follows A. C. S. Peacock; the reading of it as a division of patrimony rather than a delegation of provinces, and its connection to Qāvurt's claim of 1073 that a brother precedes a son, is this study's. The account of Turkmen discontent with Iraqi pasture as the substance of Ibrāhīm Yinal's following likewise follows Peacock.

The marriage sequence is well documented and the dates given are: Khadīja Arslān Khātūn, daughter of Chaghrī, married to al-Qāʾim in 1056; Tughril's request for the caliph's daughter Sayyida conveyed by the *qāḍī* of Rayy in 1061, against the caliph's wishes; the contract concluded outside Tabriz in August–September 1062 with a marriage portion reported at one hundred thousand dinars; Sayyida brought to the sultan's palace in March–April 1063; Tughril dead in October 1063; Sayyida returned to Baghdad by Alp Arslan in 1064. The itemised distribution of the marriage payment is set out in George Makdisi's article on the marriage of Tughril Beg, published in 1970; the figures are reported here only as existing and itemised, since the article's text has not been consulted directly. The caliph's message of 429/1037 asking Tughril to stop destroying the conquered cities and mistreating his subjects is reported in the same scholarly literature.

No figures are given in this module for the number of assignments made, the revenue any assignment carried, or the proportion of the empire's tax under assignment at any date, because the surviving material does not support them. That absence is itself a fact about the case: a settlement built out of register entries has left almost no registers.

MODULE 3

THE EXALTED SULTAN, KING OF KINGS

Module 3 · the robe — the two titles a Seljuk wore on one coin, the one document he could not have written for himself, and the stack of five questions beneath it that no money could settle

Two titles on one disc

Start with an object rather than a claim, because in this case the object survives and most of the claims do not.

A pale gold dinar struck at Herat in the year 458 of the Hijra — 1065 or 1066 — carries in its field the name of Alp Arslan and the titles *al-sulṭān al-muʿaẓẓam shāhanshāh*: the Exalted Sultan, King of Kings. The rest of the disc carries what every Islamic gold coin of the period carried — the profession of faith, the name of the Prophet, Qur'ānic verses round the margin — and, in the ordinary place for it, the name of the reigning Abbasid caliph.

Two things about that coin should be said at once, and the second undoes most of what is usually said about the first.

The first is that the sultan is wearing two garments on a surface the size of a thumbnail, and they come from different wardrobes. *Sulṭān* is Arabic and Qur'ānic; *shāhanshāh* is Persian and Sasanian, the title of the empire that Islam destroyed. A man who wears both is addressing two rooms at once, and knows it.

The second is that neither garment was made for him, and both were taken from the men he had just replaced. *Shāhanshāh* had been assumed by ʿAḍud al-Dawla the Buyid. And putting the Abbasid caliph's name on your coinage was not an act of devotion: it was the universal convention of the eastern Islamic world and had been for generations. The Samanids did it. The Ghaznavids did it. And the Buyids did it — a house of the other confession, who kept the caliph on a stipend they could cut and had blinded two of his predecessors, and who named him on their coins for a hundred and ten years.

So the two facts most often cited as evidence of Seljuk piety turn out to be evidence of a convention that a Shīʿī dynasty observed while blinding caliphs.

What is genuinely new is the word *sulṭān* standing in the field as a formal, personal, heritable title of office.

A word from the Qur'ān

Sulṭān is not, in origin, a person. In Qur'ānic usage it is an abstract noun meaning authority, warrant, sanction — the licence or proof by which one may do a thing. Its hardening into a title borne by a named man is an eleventh-century development, contested in its details; Maḥmūd of Ghazna is often credited with the first use, and the point at which it becomes a formal style on coinage and in diplomas falls inside the period this study covers.

The choice repays reading slowly.

It is a Qur'ānic word, so nobody can call it an innovation. It names, with an accuracy that is almost brazen, the only thing its holder actually had: the power to compel, and a warrant for using it. And — the decisive property — it is not *khalīfa* and not *imām*. It advances no claim whatever on the office of the man in Baghdad.

That is not modesty; it is the entire mechanism. Compare the two titles as claims. *Amīr al-mu'minīn* and *khalīfa* describe a standing — a relation to the community, to the Prophet, to God. *Sulṭān* describes a capacity. **The two offices could sit in one city for a century and a half without collision because their titles did not overlap at any point.** One man had the warrant; the other had the standing to certify that the warrant was lawful. And the reason the sultan wanted certification rather than simply asserting it is the reason he was careful never to claim the certifying office: had he taken it, the certificate would have become his own say-so, and his own say-so he already possessed, backed by cavalry, for nothing.

Nine years before Baghdad

The chronology settles how the transaction should be read, and it is not the chronology the received story implies.

Tughril is reported to have had the Friday sermon pronounced in his own name at Nishapur in 1038 — before Dandānaqān, before he held anything that could be called an empire, before any caliph had granted him anything. The report comes through the historiographical tradition and the exact titulature is not confirmed here against dated coinage. But the direction is not in doubt, because the next step is documented. After Dandānaqān in 1040 the Seljuk leaders wrote to al-Qā'im asking for a decree of authority. In 1046 al-Qā'im sent a diploma recognising Seljuk rule over Khurasan —

nine years before Tughril entered Baghdad, concerning a province the caliph could not have reached with a courier.

Then Baghdad in December 1055. Then the investiture of 1058, with two crowns held above his head in the chronicle accounts and the style King of the East and West. Then the year of Fatimid sermons while the sultan was away killing his brother. Then the restoration in January 1060, and further honours.

In every instance the taking came first and the granting came after, sometimes by years; and in the one case where the caliph granted before the taking, he was granting away a province he had never held. No investiture in the sequence conferred anything. Each ratified.

Which raises the question the module exists to answer. If the fact was already made by cavalry, why did the strongest man between the Oxus and the Mediterranean spend twenty-five years, a war and a hundred thousand dinars obtaining the ratification?

The answer is a property of the issuer, not of the document. **The decree was worth having exactly and only because Tughril could not have written it.** Had he been able to issue it himself it would have conveyed nothing — it would have been his own preference in formal language, and everyone in the room could see that a strong man's preference is enforceable only while he is strong. A title issued by an armed competitor is not a title. It is a report on who is currently winning, and it expires with the winning.

There is therefore no version of taking this by force that yields the thing. You cannot seize the property of not having been seized.

The specification was that he had nothing

From which follows the observation that reverses the usual account of the eleventh-century caliphate.

The caliph's weakness was not a defect in the instrument. It was the specification.

Everything the sources record about al-Qā'im's condition — no soldiers, no revenue, a stipend a Turkish general could stop, a palace he could be carried out of by six hundred horsemen — reads as humiliation and was experienced as humiliation. It is also precisely what made him usable. **An author of title who acquires an army stops being an author and becomes a claimant**, because the moment he can enforce his own decrees they become indistinguishable from his ambitions. The men who wanted his signature wanted one that could not be suspected of self-interest, could not be produced by any of them, and could not be withdrawn under pressure because the issuer had nothing a rival could threaten except his life.

This is why the most extraordinary fact of the preceding century is not extraordinary at all once the mechanism is seen. The Buyids were of the other confession, held Baghdad by force from 945, regarded the Abbasid line as illegitimate in principle, and could have abolished the office on any morning of a hundred and ten years. They never did — because a caliph in custody was an instrument with no substitute, and abolishing him would have destroyed the only thing that could make a Daylamite mercenary's rule over Iraq into something other than the current arrangement of force.

And it is why the sultans behaved as they did toward the office. Across the whole period they married the caliph's daughter and married their own daughters to him; they cut and restored his stipend; they took him into custody, escorted him, fought a war over physical possession of him, and eventually killed one of his successors. Every one of those is an attempt to control the *man*. Not one is an attempt to acquire the *office*. **They tried steadily to own the occupant while conspicuously not owning the position, because owning the position would have destroyed the thing they were buying from it.**

The other answer

Which brings the module to the Fatimids, and to a correction of the intuitive reading.

It is tempting to say the Abbasid signature had a price because a rival caliph in Cairo issued competing paper, and that two suppliers made a market. That is backwards, and getting it backwards obscures what the Fatimid caliphate is.

The scarcity does not come from the competition. It comes from the fact that no armed competitor can be the source of his own title — which would be true if the Abbasid caliph were the only such source on earth. The Fatimid caliphate is not a second supplier bidding up an existing good. **It is the same move made by a party locked out of the first one.** A house that could not obtain title from the Abbasid line — closed by descent, and mutually exclusive with its own claim — constituted an author of its own on a rival genealogy, and then began the long argument over which conveyed the real thing. Antipopes are made the same way and for the same reason.

And on the logic of the instrument a second answer is a **defect**. A source of title works by yielding one answer everybody can check against the same reference; when there are two, the reference settles nothing and the dispute moves up a level, from who holds the province to which caliph is the caliph. This case supplies the bill with precision. In the winter of 1058–59 a Turkish freedman with a Fatimid subsidy and a few hundred cavalry entered Baghdad, put the Cairo caliph's name into the sermon for close to forty weeks across Iraq, killed the caliphal vizier, and carried al-Qāʾim off up the

Euphrates while a palace was prepared for him in Egypt. **Two answers to one question did not raise the price of the good. They produced a war over custody of an old man with no soldiers**, and cost the dynasty its capital for a year.

Which also makes sense of the strangest document on the eve. In 402/1011 al-Qādir convened an assembly which declared the Fatimid claim of descent from ʿAlī fraudulent. That is not theology pursued for its own sake, and it is not a substitute for an army. It is an attack aimed at the one vulnerability a manufactured author has: **that somebody can be seen making it.** A received source of title works because no hand is visible behind it; a constructed one fails when the construction shows. Al-Qādir could not march on Cairo. He could try to make the seam show.

The stack

Now the part I had wrong on a first reading, and it matters most.

It is easy to conclude from all of the above that the apparatus of coins and diplomas was aimed at the literate and at rival dynasts, and that the cultivators were irrelevant to it — their obedience cheap, their Islam old, owed to nobody, unavailable for purchase. Half of that is right. The coin, the diploma and the marriage contract are documents, and documents address people who read, count and file.

The other half is wrong, and this study will spend its central module showing how wrong. The population's belief was deep, formed in childhood, and held sacred; and *because* it was deep, whether a man ruled lawfully in Islamic terms was not a matter of indifference to the people he ruled. It was a question they had opinions about and would riot over and occasionally kill over.

But being the correct ruler in an Islamic sense was not one question. It was a stack of five, and each layer had a different audience, a different degree of settledness, and a different price.

Muslim at all. Completely settled, no contest, free. The Seljuks arrived holding it.

Sunnī or Shīʿī. The most load-bearing layer and among the newest. Karkh was pillaged in 959 and burned twice in the 970s over this; al-Basāsīrī's forty Fridays were a war fought on it. This is the layer where the Seljuks' arrival actually bought something from the population, and it is what the "Sunni restoration" story is really about — though the restoration had begun before them.

Which school of law. Not settled at all. The Nishapur factional wars, the Ḥanafī–Shāfiʿī split that al-Kundurī rode into a persecution. The sultans were Ḥanafīs ruling cities that largely were not.

Which theology. Actively contested, and the state lost it in the street.

Lawfully invested. The only layer with a single vendor and a determinate answer.

And that is why the sultans bought so hard at the top of the stack and so little below it. The investiture was the one layer where there was a counter to pay at, one seller, and an answer that settled. The four beneath had no single vendor, no determinate answer, and a population willing to kill over them, so no amount of money could close them. What money could do at those layers was fund a faction — which is what it did, and which produced a fight rather than a settlement.

Cursed from the pulpits

The episode that shows exactly where the sultans' power to change things stopped.

Tughril's first vizier, ʿAmīd al-Mulk al-Kundurī, was a Khurasanian secretary of Muʿtazilī conviction who had come up through — and been passed over by — the Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī establishment of Nishapur. From about 1053 he used the Seljuk state to persecute the Ashʿarīs. Their scholars were removed from preaching, teaching and the Friday sermon; their doctrines, and al-Ashʿarī himself, were cursed from the pulpits, in Nishapur first and, the partisan accounts say, spreading into Syria, the Ḥijāz and Iraq. Al-Qushayrī, who wrote a treatise in their defence, was publicly humiliated and imprisoned. Al-Juwaynī, whom his contemporaries called the Imām of the Two Sanctuaries, left the country and spent some four years teaching at Mecca and Medina because it was not safe to teach at home.

Then al-Kundurī fell. He had backed the wrong candidate at Tughril's death in 1063; Alp Arslan imprisoned him on the last day of that year and had him killed on 29 November 1064. His successor was Nizām al-Mulk — a Shāfiʿī in law and an Ashʿarī in theology — and the policy reversed entirely. The persecuted returned to their posts. Within a few years the same state was building and endowing colleges to house them. Al-Juwaynī came back from the Ḥijāz to a chair at Nishapur; his pupil al-Ghazālī would hold the chair at Baghdad.

In about ten years the same dynasty had a school of theology cursed from the pulpits of its empire and then paid to build it lecture halls. Nothing in the doctrine changed. What changed was which Persian secretary held the vizierate.

The point is not that the sultans were frauds. Al-Kundurī's Muʿtazilism appears to have been genuine, and so does Nizām al-Mulk's Ashʿarism; both were acting on real convictions and old Nishapur grudges. What the reversal exposes is the sultan's **indifference**, and that is the more useful fact. Tughril and Alp Arslan were Ḥanafīs who required that there be one authorised answer in their territories. They did not require that it be any particular answer.

Now set that beside the other half of the ledger. In the same century and a half, no sultan attempted to replace the caliph, appoint one from outside the line, hold the

office himself, or abolish it — and neither had the Shīʿī dynasty before them, with every doctrinal reason to and a hundred and ten years in which to do it.

What a ruler can reverse by moving one official measures the reach of his power. What he never touches, though nothing physical prevents him, measures what his power rests on.

You have taught these Turks

One further consequence follows from the same episode.

Several sources give al-Kundurī a line as he went to his death, addressed to the man who had displaced him: that Nizām al-Mulk had taught these Turks the practice of killing their viziers. It has the shape of a later dramatisation and should be flagged as one; the chroniclers of this period are fond of supplying oracles to the condemned, and this one is too apt. It is worth quoting even so, because whoever composed it had understood the arrangement exactly, and because it came true.

The doctrinal apparatus of this empire — the endowments, the chairs, the curriculum, the appointments — was built, funded and directed by Persian secretaries who held office at the pleasure of Turkish soldiers, and who could be imprisoned on the last day of a year and killed on a day in November. Al-Kundurī built one version and was strangled. Nizām al-Mulk built the other and was stabbed on the road to Baghdad in October 1092, having lived long enough for his arrangement to become the thing everyone assumed had always existed.

The men who cut the robe were the most disposable people in the order.

Reading the robe against the framework

The correction this module makes, and it is to an intuition rather than to the record. It is natural to explain the price of the caliph's endorsement by the existence of a competitor in Cairo — two suppliers, therefore a market, therefore a price. The case does not support it. What made the endorsement worth having was internal to the transaction: the buyer could not have written it, and no act of force can produce that property, because the property *is* the absence of force in its production. Cairo did not create it. Cairo is a second instance of it.

And the second answer was a cost, not a benefit. **Where two authors of title yield two answers to one question, the dispute relocates upward, from who holds the province to which source is the source** — at a price here of six hundred horsemen, forty Fridays of the wrong name, a caliph carried up the Euphrates and a capital lost for a year. The number of competing authors in a system measures how badly its

coordination problem is solved, not how valuable the solution is.

The finding, from taking the caliph's incapacity seriously as a design feature. Everything about the office that reads as humiliation is what made it usable, because an issuer who can enforce his own decrees cannot be presumed to have issued them disinterestedly. **The soundness of a source of title is inversely related to its capacity to enforce; a source that acquires the means of enforcement begins converting itself into a claimant, and forfeits the immunity that made it worth going to.**

That is a prediction as well as a description, and this case tests it directly. The Abbasid caliphs did not stay unarmed. From the 1120s they raised troops and took territory, and a caliph who marched against his own sultan was defeated and murdered in 1135 — which no sultan had contemplated doing to the office while it was harmless. **The moment the author acquired an army he stopped being the ground the armed men stood on and became one of the armed men, and became, for the first time in two centuries, a thing that could be killed.**

And the correction to the audience. The apparatus of coins and diplomas is aimed at readers, but the question of lawful rule was not confined to readers, because the belief beneath it was deep and the doctrine above it was unsettled. The sultans purchased at the only layer of that stack where purchase was possible, and at the four layers below it their money bought a faction rather than a settlement — which is the subject of the module that follows, and the reason it is the centre of this study rather than a part of it.

A note on sources.

The coin is real and the reading of it is not mine. A pale gold dinar of Alp Arslan struck at Herat in AH 458, catalogued in the standard numismatic references, bears the titles *al-sulṭān al-muʿaẓẓam shāhanshāh*; gold dinars of Tughril from Nishapur survive from the 430s AH. The general description of Seljuk coin legends follows the numismatic literature. No specific Qur'ānic verse is cited for the marginal legends or for the lexical sense of *sulṭān*, because the verses vary by issue and no particular coin's margins have been verified directly here. That naming the Abbasid caliph on coinage was the universal convention of the eastern dynasties, Buyids included, is standard, as is *shāhanshāh* as a Buyid style. Who first bore *sulṭān* as a formal title is contested and no position is taken.

Dates: the sermon at Nishapur in 1038 is flagged as unconfirmed against coinage; Dandānaqān 23 May 1040 with the request for a decree immediately after; the diploma recognising Seljuk rule in Khurasan in 1046; Baghdad entered December 1055; the investiture and the style King of the East and West in 1058; al-Basāsīrī's occupation and

the Fatimid sermons across the turn of 1058–59; the restoration in January 1060. The two crowns come through the chronicle tradition and are reported as such rather than verified against an original description.

The manifesto of 402/1011 follows Jiwa and Daftary; reading it as an attack on the visibility of the rival's construction is this study's. The persecution of the Ashʿarīs under al-Kundurī is conventionally dated from about 1053–54; al-Qushayrī's imprisonment, al-Juwaynī's roughly four years in the Ḥijāz, the cursing of al-Ashʿarī from the pulpits and the removals from teaching are reported across the biographical literature, with the claim of a spread into Syria, the Ḥijāz and Iraq coming through partisan Ashʿarī accounts. Al-Kundurī's Muʿtazilī convictions and his earlier standing in the Nishapur factions follow Bulliet and Madelung. Imprisoned 31 December 1063, executed 29 November 1064; Nizām al-Mulk vizier from that date to 14 October 1092. Al-Kundurī's reported last words are given as a probable dramatisation and are so described in the reference literature.

The proposition that an author of title must be unforgeable by the men competing for power, and that an instrument of investiture is valuable because it was not issued by the man it benefits, is stated at length in the companion study of Rollo and Tughril in this series and is applied here rather than argued. The extension offered — that a source of title which acquires enforcement capacity converts itself into a claimant — is this study's, offered as a prediction to be tested against the caliphate's twelfth-century recovery.

MODULE 4

A MULTITUDINOUS CROWD WAS IN ATTENDANCE

Module 4 · formation — what actually formed a Muslim of the eleventh century, why the vizier's colleges could not buy the one thing that mattered, and the afternoon a professor of law recanted before a crowd the state did not assemble

What formation was, and where it happened

The state built almost none of it.

A child born in Baghdad or Nishapur around 1020 was made a Muslim by his household, his quarter, his mosque and his market. He learned the Qur'ān from a neighbourhood teacher for a few coins; he learned the shape of the year from the fast and the two festivals; he learned who was who from the Friday sermon and from the storytellers and popular preachers who worked the mosque courtyards; he learned what was shameful from the men of his street. By the time any faculty capable of screening the installation had matured in him, the whole cast of the world was in place — the Prophet, the Companions, the law, the hereafter, the boundary of the community — and it was in place not as a set of propositions he might revise but as the ground he stood on.

That machinery was old, cheap, decentralised, and owned by nobody. No caliph built it, no sultan could switch it off, and it required no funding at all beyond what families and quarters already spent. It is the reason the population of this empire cost almost nothing to hold, and the reason no ruler in the case ever seriously attempted to change what ordinary people believed.

And it was working. That has to be established before anything else, because the rest of the module depends on it and because the evidence is unusually direct.

The young man on the boat

In 1066 a Ḥanbalī jurist named Ibn ʿAqīl, then twenty-six, was given a chair at the mosque of al-Manṣūr in Baghdad — partly through the patronage of a wealthy Ḥanbalī merchant, Abū Manṣūr ibn Yūsuf, who was also a confidant of the caliph. Ibn ʿAqīl had studied with Ḥanbalīs, Ḥanafīs, Shāfiʿīs, Muʿtazilīs and Sufis; three of his early teachers were women; he had defended the executed mystic al-Ḥallāj; he used the tools of speculative theology, which his own school regarded as poison. When his patron died in 1067 or 1068 he lost the chair, and for four or five years he lived in partial retirement and then in hiding, pursued by the traditionalists of his own madhhab, whose leader, the Sharīf Abū Jaʿfar al-Hāshimī, had pronounced his blood lawfully shed.

The end came in September 1072. The account, transmitted with a chain of authorities from a named eyewitness, runs like this. Ibn ʿAqīl was aboard a boat when he heard a young fellow-passenger, who had no idea who he was, say that he wished he could find this *zindīq* Ibn ʿAqīl, so that he might advance himself in God's favour by killing him and pouring out his blood. Frightened, Ibn ʿAqīl disembarked, went to the Sharīf Abū Jaʿfar and made his retraction, asking God's forgiveness.

On Monday, the eighth of Muḥarram in the year 465, in the mosque of the Sharīf Abū Jaʿfar in the quarter of Nahr Muʿallā, a professor of law read out a written renunciation of Muʿtazilism and of heretical innovation. **A multitudinous crowd was in attendance on that day** — the witness's phrase — and the document he read was afterwards copied and circulated so that readers of his books would know which parts he had repented of.

Take the measure of what is in that scene.

An ordinary young man on a Baghdad river-boat in 1072 held a settled opinion about the theological errors of a named professor of law, knew the man's name and the charge against him, and regarded killing him as a work of piety by which he might improve his own standing before God. That is not the elite. That is the general population, and the commitment is not an opinion but a sacred value — the kind that is placed beyond calculation, so that the suggestion of trading it produces not compromise but revulsion.

He was not exceptional. The Ḥanbalīs of Baghdad under the Sharīf Abū Jaʿfar were enforcing religious rules on ordinary life — breaking up music, seizing and destroying wine from taverns — and the sources note that the *ʿāmma*, the common people, backed them by joining what were described as spontaneous riots.

Whatever else is true of this order, its subjects believed, and their belief was armed. Which means that whether a ruler was lawful in Islamic terms was not a matter

of indifference to the people he ruled. It was something they had opinions about, and rioted over, and occasionally killed for.

What had not been settled

And yet the thing the young man on the boat was defending had no agreed content.

The furniture of Sunni Islam was, in 1072, very new. The canonical collections of Prophetic tradition were about two centuries old. Ashʿarī theology was about a hundred and forty years old and so contested that a vizier could have it cursed from the pulpits of Khurasan in 1053 as a matter of policy and his successor could endow chairs for it in 1067 without anyone treating either act as unthinkable. Al-Qushayrī's handbook reconciling Sufism to the law had been written in 1045. The classical statements of legal theory were being composed during the case, by al-Juwaynī and then by his pupil al-Ghazālī.

And Sunnism itself was the newest thing in the room. The current scholarship places its emergence as a bounded community with a settled orthodoxy in the eleventh century; the "big tent" — four eponymous founders, all unimpeachable, the field closed against any fifth — forms after 1000, and after this century founding a new school becomes effectively impossible. Ahmad Khan's study of that formation rests on a fact that ought to govern the reading of this whole case: **to the medieval clerics who first spoke of "Sunni Islam," Abū Ḥanīfa was a heretic**, and his passage from object of exclusion to pillar of orthodoxy runs across exactly these generations.

The Seljuk sultans were Ḥanafīs. Their first vizier was a Muʿtazilī who persecuted Ashʿarīs. Their second was an Ashʿarī who endowed them. The city they took was a Ḥanbalī street. The province they came from was fighting a Shāfiʿī–Ḥanafī factional war so bitter it burned quarters.

The belief was deep and the doctrine was open, and those two facts together are the whole condition of the eleventh century. A study that reads deep belief as evidence of settled doctrine will misdate the madrasa by three hundred years. A study that reads open doctrine as evidence of shallow belief will not understand the boat.

What the vizier actually built

Into that condition came the endowments, and it is necessary to be exact about what they were, because the received account credits them with an achievement that belongs to somebody else and misses the achievement that was real.

The madrasa was not new. Endowed colleges built by private citizens had been the rule in Khurasan for two or three generations before the Seljuks; the historical

references indicate something like three dozen at Nishapur by the eleventh century; there were pre-Seljuk instances of patronage by rulers and officials; and Tughril himself sponsored one at Nishapur before Nizām al-Mulk held office. Nor was the instrument new: the *waqf*, the perpetual endowment, was an ancient device of the private law, in which a founder alienated a property to a charitable purpose in perpetuity and specified in the deed exactly how the income was to be spent.

What Nizām al-Mulk did was scale and specify. The Baghdad Nizāmiyya was established in the mid-1060s — 1065 and 1067 both appear in the literature — and was followed by foundations at Nishapur, Isfahan, Herat, Balkh and elsewhere. They offered free tuition, stipends, housing and libraries. The Baghdad house is said to have held some three thousand students by 1096. And the founding deed stipulated the school: Shāfiʿī jurisprudence, Ashʿarī theology, the head, the preacher and the librarian all to be of the founder's madhhab, in perpetuity.

That is a considerable thing and it should not be minimised. A young man of no family who could reach Baghdad could be housed, fed, taught and paid, for years, at no cost, and could come out of it employable in courts and chanceries from Syria to Transoxiana. The Umayyads never built anything remotely like it. Neither had anyone else at this scale.

The one thing he could not buy

But he did not build the credential, and this is where the case has to correct the story it is usually told to illustrate.

The licence to teach law and issue legal opinions — the *ijāzat al-tadrīs wa'l-iftā'* — had originated in the ninth century with the formation of the schools, and it was a personal grant from one master to one student. The master was under no obligation to follow any formal criteria. Nobody could compel him to award it. No institution issued it; no state validated it; the permission to grant it lay outside the reach of the ruler and outside the reach of the college's founder alike. It was the sole prerogative of the man bestowing it, and its authority came from his own standing in a chain of teachers running back through named men.

So consider what the endowments bought, item by item. Buildings: bought. Salaries: bought. Housing and food for students: bought. The curriculum taught in a given hall: bought, and specified in the deed. Prestige, and the pull of a famous chair: bought. And the licence a graduate carried out of the door: **not bought, not for sale, and not the founder's to give.**

The Umayyad study found a dynasty that funded the corpus of a doctrine and never built the credential, and was convicted out of its own commission. It is natural to expect this case to be the other half of that experiment. It is not, and the difference is the finding.

The state here funded the premises, the payroll, the syllabus and the prestige of an interpretive class whose certification ran person to person, out of a room it did not own. That is a third arrangement the corpus-and-credential distinction does not yet name, and its consequences are exactly what the eleventh century displays: enormous influence, no ownership. The Qing comparison sharpens on the same point. The Chinese state held a certificate it had itself invented, and could therefore set the syllabus by setting the examination. No ruler in this civilisation ever held one. Funding here produced patronage, and patronage in a market with other suppliers produces a faction.

The vizier's kind of man, disciplined by the street

Which is why the Ibn ʿAqīl affair belongs in this module and not merely as colour.

Ibn ʿAqīl was, broadly, the sort of man the Nizāmiyya existed to make: a jurist willing to use rational method inside a school of law, holding a chair obtained through patronage, in the caliph's own city. His recantation came in September 1072 — five years after the Baghdad Nizāmiyya opened, eight years into Nizām al-Mulk's vizierate, at the height of the programme.

The sultan did not order it. The vizier did not order it, and would not have wanted it. It was ordered by the head of a madhhab, enforced by the threat of a pious stranger with a knife, and performed before a crowd nobody had convened. **The state's official theology was being defeated in the street of the capital by a faction it did not fund, using a sanction it could not match.**

And that pattern held. Half a century later the Ashʿarī preacher Ibn al-Qushayrī, son of the man al-Kundurī had imprisoned, came to Baghdad and provoked riots; the Shāfiʿī leader Abū Isḥāq al-Shīrāzī, the first head of the Baghdad Nizāmiyya, went repeatedly to the Sharīf Abū Jaʿfar to ask him to calm the street, and the Sharīf, who had no intention of calming anything, quietly prepared his followers. This is a state-funded institution's chief professor petitioning a private religious leader for public order, and being refused.

The best product walked out

The other limit is visible in the programme's greatest success.

In July 1091 Nizām al-Mulk appointed the thirty-three-year-old al-Ghazālī to the chair at the Baghdad Nizāmiyya. It was the most conspicuous academic position in the Islamic world; he lectured to hundreds and wrote refutations of the sect the vizier most feared. In 1095 he underwent a crisis of certainty, abandoned the chair, the salary and the position, and left Baghdad for eleven years of retirement, pilgrimage and writing. When he returned to teaching it was briefly and elsewhere, and what he had produced in the interval — the great synthesis that brought Sufism inside the law — reshaped Sunni Islam far more than anything he did in the vizier's building.

There is no reading of that on which the state owned him. **A man whose licence came from his teachers and whose standing came from his books could leave the most valuable chair in the empire on a matter of conscience and lose nothing that mattered to him**, because none of what mattered had been issued by the man who paid him. That is what an unbought credential looks like from the inside, and it is the same property, seen from the other end, that made the caliph's signature worth buying: authority that the payer did not produce cannot be withdrawn by the payer.

Who got nothing

One accounting remains, and the framework is right to insist on it.

The formation the endowments provided was open in an important sense: free, stipended, and recruiting men of no family. It was also entirely urban. It formed the town — the jurists, the judges, the secretaries, the preachers, the notables' sons. The cultivator of the Sawād or the Jibāl, whose assessed tax paid the assignment that maintained the cavalryman, received no school, no stipend, no chair, and no voice whatever in the contest over which of the layers beneath the sultan's title would win. He had the old machinery — the household, the quarter, the mosque — and it gave him a faith and no leverage.

The town's plurality was real, and it protected the town. Below the town it did nothing.

Reading formation against the framework

The finding, and it corrects a distinction this series has been using. The Umayyad case yielded the proposition that funding the corpus of a doctrine without owning the credential arms the seam, while funding the credential captures it. This case supplies an arrangement the pair does not cover.

Where an interpretive class licenses its members person to person rather than through an institution, a state may buy that class's premises, payroll, syllabus and

prestige and still not acquire its certification — and what it gets for the money is a powerful faction rather than a captured seam. The test is not how much a ruler spends but *where the licence lives*. A licence issued by an examination the state sets is capturable by setting the examination. A licence issued by one named man to another, on no formal criteria, by a grant nobody can compel, is not capturable at any price — and a college built to house such men is a very expensive way of becoming their patron.

Second, on what state patronage does in an unsettled field. The usual reading of heavy religious expenditure is that it measures the ruler's need to manufacture a belief that has not taken. That reading fails here, because the belief had taken completely and the expenditure was enormous anyway. The explanation is the condition this case is unusual in preserving: **the belief was deep and its content was open**, and money spent into an open doctrinal field does not buy authority, it buys a side. Nizām al-Mulk's foundations did not settle what Sunnism was. They armed one answer, generously, against three others that remained in the field with endowments of their own, and against a street that could break a professor without spending anything.

And the tell to carry forward. An order whose belief never took betrays itself by surveillance. An order that has entered a doctrinal contest it did not create betrays itself differently — by *funding one party to it*, and by the fact that the unfunded parties do not disappear. The mark of the limit is a state-endowed professor going to a private preacher to ask for calm, and being refused; and a professor at the empire's most famous chair walking away from it because his conscience told him to, and taking his authority with him when he went.

A note on sources.

The account of Ibn ʿAqīl's retraction — the overheard wish on the boat, the flight to the Sharīf Abū Jaʿfar, and the reading of the written retraction on Monday 8 Muḥarram 465 in the Sharīf's mosque in the quarter of Nahr Muʿallā before a large crowd — comes through the Ḥanbalī biographical tradition with a chain of transmitters from a named witness, the *qāḍī* Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Bāqī al-Bazzāz. It is preserved by later Ḥanbalī writers whose stated purpose in transmitting it was to warn readers which of Ibn ʿAqīl's books he had repented of, which is a partisan interest in the fact of the repentance and not obviously an interest in inventing the boat. It is reported here as their account. George Makdisi's studies of Ibn ʿAqīl are the modern scholarly point of entry. The date of the retraction is given variously as September 1072 and as 8 Muḥarram 465, which fall in the same year; the Gregorian equivalence has not been recomputed here.

The Ḥanbalī enforcement campaign under the Sharīf Abū Jaʿfar al-Hāshimī — the breaking up of music, the destruction of confiscated wine, the struggle against Muʿtazilī and Ashʿarī doctrine, and the participation of the *ʿāmma* in the rioting — follows the modern scholarship on eleventh-century Baghdad, principally Henri Laoust's and the more recent work on the *fitnat Ibn al-Qushayrī*. Abū Isḥāq al-Shīrāzī's repeated approaches to the Sharīf and the latter's refusal come from the same literature.

Ibn ʿAqīl's chair at al-Manṣūr in 1066 at the age of twenty-six, the patronage of Abū Manṣūr ibn Yūsuf and its loss on the patron's death in 1067 or 1068, and his years of hiding are standard. Abū Manṣūr's standing as a Ḥanbalī merchant, benefactor and confidant of al-Qāʾim follows Makdisi.

On the madrasa: that endowed colleges built by private citizens were already the rule before the Seljuks, that Nishapur held something like three dozen by the eleventh century, and that Tughril sponsored one there before Nizām al-Mulk, follow the standard reference literature on the institution. The Baghdad Nizāmiyya's foundation is given as 1065 in some sources and 1067 in others; free tuition, stipends, housing and library, the stipulation of Shāfiʿī law and Ashʿarī theology in the deed, and a figure of about three thousand students by 1096 are as reported, with the student figure treated as an impression of scale.

On the *ijāza*: that the *ijāzat al-tadrīs wa'l-iftāʾ* originated in the ninth century, was awarded by an individual teacher under no obligation to follow formal criteria, was the sole prerogative of the man bestowing it, and lay outside the reach of the state and of a madrasa's founder, follows George Makdisi's account of the institution and the subsequent literature on it. The inference drawn from it here — that the Seljuk case is a third arrangement beside the Umayyad and the Qing, in which premises and payroll were bought and certification was not — is this study's.

On the newness of Sunnism, Ahmad Khan's study of the making of Sunnism from the eighth to the eleventh century is followed, including the finding on Abū Ḥanīfa's reputation among the earliest users of the term; the position that Sunnism in the bounded sense post-dates 1000 is current scholarship, contested at the margins, and stated as such.

Al-Ghazālī's appointment in July 1091 at thirty-three, his crisis in 1095, and his departure are standard; the number of his students is not given here beyond the Nizāmiyya's reported total. The reading of his departure as evidence that the state did not own him is this study's.

MODULE 5

THE GRASS AND THE PAYROLL

Module 5 · the cost column — two armies that had to be paid in two currencies the same country could not both produce, a population that cost nothing, and an endowment designed so that it could never be cut

What was cheap

Begin with the saving, because it was very large and it is what made everything else survivable for as long as it was.

The population of this empire held itself. Nothing in the Seljuk apparatus was spent on making anyone a Muslim, because everyone who mattered demographically already was one and had been formed as one in childhood by a machinery — household, quarter, mosque, market — that the state neither built, funded, nor could have switched off. There was no established church to endow, no conversion programme, no parallel administration for a subject religion, and no garrison required in every town to hold a hostile creed down. The residual Christians and Jews of Iraq were taxed rather than suppressed, and the taxing of them was a revenue item rather than a cost.

Set that beside what a conquest normally has to spend on being obeyed and the difference is the whole of this order's margin. Compare a colonial order laid over a population whose belief the conqueror does not hold and cannot use: garrisons, a police, a settler establishment, a permanent information problem. The Seljuks had none of that with respect to their subjects. **Their entire expenditure went on soldiers, on administration, and on a doctrinal contest inside a faith everybody already shared.**

That margin is the reason a nomad confederation could hold Iran and Iraq at all. It is also the reason the order had no slack: because the cheap part was already free, every increase in the military bill had to come out of a revenue base that was itself in long decline.

Two armies, two currencies

The expensive part was the army, and the army was two armies whose requirements could not both be met from the same country.

The free Turkmen who won the empire were households with flocks. They could not be quartered in a town; they could not be paid a salary they had no use for; they could not be assigned the tax of an irrigated district, because they did not live near one and would not have stayed if they had. What they required was **grass** — seasonal pasture, in quantity, within reach of water, and defensible. Iraq is marsh, desert and irrigated field, and has essentially none of it. Iran has upland pasture and it was already occupied.

The consequence was recorded within twenty years of the conquest. When Ibrāhīm Yinal raised his revolt against his half-brother in 1058, the sources report the Turkmen grievance in domestic terms: the country Tughril had brought them to was unbearable for their flocks, they blamed him for it, and they attached themselves to a rival on the express condition that he would not take them back to Iraq and would not make peace. The founding army revolted against the founding conquest, over grazing, and it cost the dynasty its capital for a year.

The purchased soldiers required the opposite. *Ghulāms* — bought as boys, converted, trained, without tribe or pasture or rival lineage — must be housed, fed, equipped and paid, continuously, in cash or in an assignment on a cash-yielding district. They are worth the expense precisely because they have no other claim and nowhere else to go, which is another way of saying that the entire relation is the payment. Alp Arslan is reported to have brought back very large numbers of them from a raid into the Khazar lands in 456/1064 — between the liquidation of al-Basāsīrī and Manzikert, in the years when the confederation was being converted into a state. By 1073, when Malik-Shāh faced his uncle Qāvurt, the sultan's army was *ghulāms*, Kurds and Arabs, and Qāvurt's was Turkmen.

So the empire had to produce, simultaneously and permanently, upland pasture it did not possess and a cash revenue that was falling. There is no price at which both bills are paid. The Turkmen were therefore settled by being let go westward, into Armenian and Anatolian country where the grass was good and the raiding was lawful, which relieved the pressure at the cost of exporting the dynasty's own founding constituency to a frontier it could not administer. And the *ghulāms* were paid by assignment, which pushed the cost down onto the assessed districts and, as the next module shows, onto the districts' future.

The establishment

Beneath the armies sat an administration whose cost was smaller in coin and larger in consequence.

Paying soldiers in assessments rather than acres requires a survey, a chancery, an audit and a courier service, permanently, or the assessments stop meaning anything. The Seljuks inherited a Persian and Arab bureaucracy capable of all four and employed it: al-Kundurī and Nizām al-Mulk were both Khurasanian secretaries trained under the Ghaznavids, and beneath them ran the *dīwāns*, the assessors, the local *ʿāmils* and the town notables who actually knew what a district owed.

The bill for that establishment was payable in two ways. In money it was modest. In power it was the whole of the arrangement, because the men who could operate it were a small, self-reproducing, geographically concentrated professional class with their own families, their own factions and their own school allegiances — and the sultans had no substitute for them. That is why a vizier could hold thirty years of near-sovereign authority, and why the answer to a vizier who had grown too large was always the same and always personal: imprison him on the last day of the year and kill him in November.

The charge that could not be lifted

And then there is the item that the received account treats as the vizier's monument and that belongs, in a cost column, on the other side of the page.

An endowment is a perpetual charge on a revenue. The whole design of the instrument is that a founder alienates a property to a purpose in perpetuity, specifies in the deed how the income is to be spent, and thereby places it beyond his own later discretion and beyond his successors'. The Nizāmiyya foundations at Baghdad, Nishapur, Isfahan, Herat, Balkh and elsewhere were funded that way: buildings, chairs, stipends, student housing, libraries, all charged in perpetuity on assigned properties, with the school and the offices stipulated in the deed.

The strength of the instrument is exactly its cost. **A ruler who funds an interpretive class through endowment has converted a discretionary expense into a fixed one, and has done so on purpose, because a stipend that can be stopped is not the same offer as one that cannot.** The men being recruited understood that as clearly as the founder did; it is a large part of why they came.

It should be said plainly that this is stickiness rather than permanence. Endowments were taxed, exchanged and confiscated by later states — the Ottomans imposed land tax on Egyptian endowments with juristic cover; exchange of endowed property was widely abused in the late Mamluk period; Egyptian endowments were taxed in 1809 and then seized — and even in doctrine the Ḥanafīs held a foundation revocable by the founder or his heirs absent a court ruling. What an endowment does is not remove the option of defunding but raise its price to a conspicuous public act of expropriation, justified in the language of the class being expropriated.

Which is a real constraint on a state whose costs are rising. When the succession wars came, and the Nizārī sieges, and the campaigns that achieved nothing, the properties funding three thousand students at Baghdad were not available to be swept into the war chest without a scandal nobody wanted. **The vizier built his monument out of revenue he had deliberately made hard for the sultanate to reach**, and did it in the decades when the sultanate's need for reachable revenue was about to become acute.

What the top of the arrangement cost

By comparison the price of legitimation was trivial, and the comparison is instructive.

The caliph received a restored stipend, protection, and rank. The traffic in marriages ran both ways and the one recorded price — the hundred thousand dinars settled on the caliph's daughter in 1062, with the distribution itemised by recipient — is a large sum for a wedding and a rounding error against an army. The investiture ceremonies cost robes and a procession. The diplomas cost ink.

The single most valuable thing this order possessed was also the cheapest thing in the ledger, and that is not an accident but a property of what it was: an authorisation issued by a man with nothing, whose whole worth consisted in his inability to have produced it in his own interest. There is no version of the transaction in which it costs much, because there is nothing the seller needs that the buyer's money can supply. What the buyer pays for is the seller's continued existence in a condition of harmlessness — which is why the sums are small, and why the effort went into custody, marriage and protection rather than into payment.

Reading the cost column against the framework

The finding. An order can be expensive in a way that has no solution, and this one was. **Where a conquest must pay two armies whose requirements are met by different and mutually exclusive kinds of country, there is no equilibrium price for holding it** — not because the total is large but because the two bills cannot be denominated in the same currency. Pasture cannot be raised by better assessment. Cash cannot be grazed. Every measure that satisfies one constituency is neutral or hostile to the other, and the state's only available manoeuvre is to move one of them out of the country, which converts a fiscal problem into a frontier and defers it rather than solving it.

That yields a diagnostic worth carrying: when a conquering coalition contains both a tribal element that lives off land use and a professional element that lives off revenue, expect the tribal element to be paid in permission and geography rather than in money, expect it to revolt when the geography runs out, and expect the professional element to grow at its expense — because only one of the two can be paid out of an agricultural surplus.

Second, and this compounds what the cheapness of the population implies. This order's margin came entirely from the fact that nobody had to be persuaded of anything. That is normally read as strength, and it was. But it also means the order had **no compressible expenditure**. A state that spends heavily on holding a population's belief has, in a crisis, something it can cut. A state whose belief costs nothing has already realised that saving, permanently, and every subsequent shock lands directly on the military and administrative accounts with nothing to absorb it.

Which is the sharper form of the point. Cheapness of belief is not slack. It is a saving already taken. The orders in this series that ran cheaply on conviction were not thereby more resilient to fiscal shock; they were, if anything, less, because the one large item that a harder-pressed order can economise on was not in their budget to begin with. And in this case the position was worse still, since the one expenditure the state did make in the belief column — the endowments — was deliberately constructed so that it could not be economised on either.

A note on sources.

No figures are offered here for the size of the Seljuk army at any date, the total revenue of the empire, the cost of the *ghulām* establishment, or the endowed income of any foundation, because the surviving material does not support them. Where numbers appear elsewhere in this study they are ranges drawn from narrative sources and flagged as such. The absence is itself informative: an empire that paid its soldiers out of a register has left almost no registers.

Alp Arslan's expedition into the Khazar lands in 456/1064 and its yield of *mamlūks* follows David Ayalon's study of the Seljuk *mamlūks*. The composition of Malik-Shāh's army against Qāvurt in 1073 as *ghulāms*, Kurds and Arabs against Qāvurt's Turkmen is in the narrative sources; the contrast drawn from it is this study's. The account of Ibrāhīm Yinal's following as driven by Turkmen discontent with Iraqi pasture, and the condition they are reported to have extracted from him, follows A. C. S. Peacock.

On the endowment as an instrument: that a *waqf* alienates property to a purpose in perpetuity with the terms stipulated in the deed is standard. On its vulnerability in practice — Ottoman taxation of Egyptian endowment lands with juristic cover supplied by Ebussuud, the widespread abuse of substitution in the late Mamluk period, and the taxation of Egyptian endowments in 1809 followed by confiscation — the modern literature on endowment administration is followed, together with the Ḥanafī doctrinal position that a foundation is revocable absent a court ruling. The inference that the endowments constituted an uncompressible charge on the sultanate's revenue at exactly the wrong moment is this study's.

The marriage portion of one hundred thousand dinars settled in 1062, and the survival of its distribution by recipient, follow George Makdisi's article on the marriage of Tughril Beg; the figures are reported here as existing and itemised rather than reproduced, the article not having been consulted directly.

MODULE 6

NOTHING BEYOND THE LAWFUL ASSESSMENT

Module 6 · extraction — how a revenue reached a cavalryman, why the instrument that prevented a landed nobility guaranteed that nobody would ever own the improvement, and what the prohibitions in a court manual confess

The chain

The mechanism was short and it had four links.

A district was assessed — a figure, arrived at by survey and custom and negotiation, for what its cultivators owed in land tax. That assessment was assigned by the central chancery to a named man, ordinarily a commander, in place of a salary, by a document. He collected it, or had it collected, through the existing local apparatus: the headmen, the assessors, the *ʿāmil*. Out of it he maintained himself and the troopers he was required to bring when summoned.

Everything that matters about this order's extraction is contained in what that chain does and does not include.

It does not include ownership of the soil. As the previous module on the settlement established from al-Māwardī's chapter on the subject, conquered land set aside for the treasury had passed under the rule of perpetual endowment: its freehold could not be granted, sold or given away. The assignee received a claim on a stream, not a title to a place.

It does not include jurisdiction over persons. The assignee's claim ran against the assessment and stopped there. He was not a lord; the cultivators were not his; he could not judge them, bind them to the soil, or take their labour.

It does not include tenure. The assignment could be enlarged, reduced, moved to another district, or cancelled, and the whole interest of the central government lay in keeping it so.

And it does not include anybody with a reason to invest.

What the prohibitions confess

The clearest statement of how the arrangement was supposed to work comes from the Persian mirror for princes produced at the Seljuk court around 1091 and attributed to Nizām al-Mulk. Its authorship is a live dispute and this study treats it throughout as a court text of that decade rather than as the vizier's testimony — which, for present purposes, makes it *more* useful, because what a court finds it necessary to prescribe is a map of what is going wrong.

The chapter on assignees insists on four things. They have no claim on the subjects beyond the tax lawfully assigned to them. Once it is collected, the subjects are to be secure in their persons, property, wives, children, lands and goods. Any subject wishing to bring his case to the ruler must not be prevented from doing so. And collectors and assignees should be moved on after three or four years, so that they do not become too strong.

Every one of those is a prohibition, and a prohibition is a description of what people are doing. Nobody legislates against a thing that is not happening. Read together they describe assignees extracting beyond the assessment, treating cultivators as their own, blocking appeals to the centre, and above all sitting still.

And the fourth prescription, which is the remedy, is also the disease.

Three or four years

Consider what a term of three or four years does to a man's incentives.

He holds a claim on the assessed tax of a district. He does not own the land, cannot pass it to his son, and expects to be moved. Anything he spends on the district's future — clearing a silted channel, repairing a head-gate, remitting a bad year so that the cultivators are still there next year — is spent on behalf of the man who will replace him. Anything he extracts above the assessment is his, now, and the cost of it falls on a district he will not be holding when the cost matures.

Every incentive in that structure points at the current year and away from every year after it. The remedy for a muqṭaʿ who becomes too strong is rotation; rotation is precisely what guarantees that no muqṭaʿ has an interest in the land's future. The court text prescribes both halves without noticing that they are the same half.

This is not an argument that the assignees were wicked. It is an argument about a position. A man in that position who did invest would be a man who had confused his own interests with somebody else's, and there is no reason to expect many such men in any century.

Nor was the alternative available. The state could not grant the freehold — the law forbade it — and would not have wanted to, because a grantee with an inheritable estate is the beginning of a nobility and the end of a central chancery. **The settlement fiction that prevented a feudal aristocracy in Iraq also ensured that no party in the chain of extraction, from the sultan down to the headman, held an interest that outlasted a few harvests.**

Who paid, and in what

The cultivator paid the land tax, and paid it to whoever the chancery had most recently named, out of a yield that had been falling for a century and a half for reasons nobody in the chain had caused or could fix.

The towns paid market dues, tolls and the various levies on trade — a category the jurists were perpetually uneasy about, since much of it had no clear warrant in the law, and which the pious rulers of the period periodically announced they were abolishing and periodically resumed.

The remaining Christians and Jews of Iraq paid the poll tax, and their communities were left otherwise alone: this order had no interest whatever in converting them and a standing interest in their continuing to be taxable.

And the assignees paid nothing, kept what they collected, and provided troopers.

What the record will and will not support

Two cautions, because the temptation here is to write a ruin.

The first is that the decline of Iraqi agriculture long predates the Seljuks and was not caused by them. The great fall in the Sawād's assessments belongs to the ninth and tenth centuries; the Nahrawān was breached in 937 or 938 by a warlord who never repaired it; the salinisation and the abandoned tillage were a century old when Tughril arrived. What the Seljuk settlement did was install an extraction system with no party to it who had a reason to reverse any of that. It inherited a wound and dressed it in a way that guaranteed it would not close.

The second is that the period is not uniformly one of ruin. Malik-Shāh's reign is remembered by hostile and friendly sources alike as prosperous and orderly; Isfahan was built in; the roads were policed well enough for the trade to move; and the astronomical commission the sultan funded produced, in 1079, a solar calendar of an accuracy Europe would not match for five hundred years. A state can be extracting destructively in the countryside and building conspicuously in its cities at the same time, and this one was.

Reading extraction against the framework

The finding, and it is the price of the settlement fiction rather than an independent fault. Paying an army in revocable assignments on assessed revenue is the correct answer to the problem of a conquering caste that might otherwise become a landed nobility, and the doctrine this conquest had adopted permitted no other answer. It works. Iraq produced no barons.

But an instrument that keeps every holder's tenure short and every holder's title revocable also ensures that no one in the chain of extraction ever owns the improvement. The freehold belongs to a legal abstraction — the community of Muslims, in perpetuity — which cannot dig a canal. The state holds the residual claim and is three weeks away. The assignee holds a claim that expires. The cultivator holds no title anyone is bound to defend. Between them there is no party whose interests extend past the next assessment, and the physical plant of the richest agricultural region in the Islamic world sat in that gap for three centuries.

So the proposition to carry forward is that **the choice between paying a conquering army in land and paying it in revenue is not a choice between a bad option and a good one but between two failure modes with different clocks.** Pay in land and the grantees become a nobility that the state cannot recall, which is a political failure arriving in generations. Pay in revocable revenue and the land is stripped by men with no stake in it, which is an economic failure arriving in harvests. The first destroys the state's authority; the second destroys the state's base. And a doctrine that forecloses the first option has not solved the problem — it has selected the second and made it unavoidable.

And the small confirmation, which is the module's method as much as its finding. The evidence that the state understood all of this is that its own manual legislates against it: no claim beyond the assessment, security of the subject thereafter, appeals not to be obstructed, holders rotated every three or four years. **Prescriptions are confessions.** The last of the four is a confession twice over — once that assignees were entrenching, and once, unwittingly, that the cure and the disease were the same measure.

A note on sources.

The mechanism of the *iqṭāʿ* as an assignment of assessed revenue rather than of soil, carrying no jurisdiction over the cultivators' persons and no contract of homage, and in principle neither for life nor heritable, follows Claude Cahen, together with his warning that the term should not be rendered by the European word *fief*. Ann Lambton's judgement that the operative system was a Buyid legacy rather than a Seljuk innovation is followed. The legal position that conquered land set aside for the treasury falls under the rule of perpetual endowments and cannot be granted, sold or given away is quoted from al-Māwardī in the module on the settlement and is not repeated here.

The four provisions of the chapter on assignees in the Persian mirror attributed to Nizām al-Mulk are paraphrased from the standard renderings rather than quoted, and are consistently reported across them. The text is treated throughout this study as a court document of about 1091 rather than as the vizier's own testimony, its attribution having been contested since Zakhoder's work of 1949 and more recently by Khismatulin, with Yavari defending it; nothing here depends on resolving the dispute.

The long decline of Sawād assessments, its dating to the ninth and tenth centuries, and its connection to soil output rather than accounting failure alone follow Waines and Campopiano, with the figures given as orders of magnitude in the landscape and not repeated. The Nahrawān breach is dated 937/8.

The solar calendar instituted under Malik-Shāh in 1079, on which Omar Khayyām served, is standard; the comparison of its accuracy with the later European reform is a commonplace of the literature and is offered as such rather than as a computation performed here. No figures are given for tax rates, total yields, or the number or size of assignments, because the material does not support them.

MODULE 7

THE ONLY KINGDOM WITHOUT INFORMERS

Module 7 · information and suppression — a court manual complaining that the state has no spies, an empire that could speak to every mosque in Asia every Friday, and a castle it could see and never enter

The complaint

The most useful sentence in the whole Seljuk administrative literature is a complaint about something that was not there.

In the Persian mirror for princes composed at the Seljuk court around 1091, there is a chapter on intelligence which states, in substance, that the Seljuks are alone among Muslim realms in not maintaining a network of agents across their territories, and that this omission is capable of doing great harm. The book is a work of advocacy — its whole form is a minister telling a sultan what earlier kings did that his own house does not — and this chapter is advocacy at its plainest. It is not describing an apparatus. It is asking for one.

Which means the standard picture is wrong at the root. The received account of this empire credits Nizām al-Mulk with building a network of intelligence agents alongside the colleges and the assignments, as though surveillance were one of the pillars of the arrangement. **The one contemporary court document on the subject says the opposite: that there was no such network, and that somebody at court badly wanted there to be.**

The reason for the omission is given in the same tradition and it is a good one. A ruler who plants agents through his own provinces has created an instrument that his officials will assume is aimed at them, and that whoever controls it can aim at anyone. The postal-intelligence service of the earlier caliphate had lapsed, and reviving it under a Turkish sultanate administered by Persian secretaries would have handed a faction of that bureaucracy a weapon against the amirs — and against the other faction. **A sultan who declined to build an informer service was not being naïve. He was declining to arm his own vizier.**

What the state could do

The absence of an inbound apparatus is the more striking because the outbound one was superb.

Every Friday, in every congregational mosque from the Oxus to the Euphrates, the preacher named the reigning sovereign at the opening of the sermon. It cost the state nothing — the mosques existed, the preachers were paid by their own communities or endowments, the congregation assembled of its own accord — and it delivered, weekly and simultaneously, to a population that could not read, a statement of who was lawfully in charge, which every hearer knew that every other hearer was hearing at the same moment. To be named was to be recognised. To be dropped was to be deposed. To substitute a name was to declare war, which is exactly what al-Basāsīrī did in January 1059 and exactly why it mattered.

Coinage did the same thing more slowly and more durably, in a medium that circulated through every market and could not be recalled.

So this order's information capability was very strong in one direction and effectively nil in the other. **It could tell everybody something. It could find out almost nothing.**

What was policed, and what was not

Set against that, the list of what the state actually suppressed is short, and the list of what it left entirely alone is long and revealing.

It left alone the content of religious teaching, except where it funded a chair and stipulated a school in the deed — which is patronage, not policing. It left alone the quarrels of the four schools, which were violent and public and repeatedly burned parts of Baghdad. It left alone the Ḥanbalī enforcement squads breaking up music and destroying wine. It left alone the popular preachers. It left alone the courts, which ran on the law and on judges the caliph appointed. It left alone the Christians and Jews, who were taxed and otherwise ignored. It left alone, entirely, the licensing of scholars, which as the module on formation established was never in any state's gift in this civilisation.

What it policed was one thing: the Ismāʿīlīs, and after 1094 the Nizārī branch of them.

That is a rational target. A movement with a rival caliph, a missionary organisation, a doctrine of the hidden imam and a demonstrated capacity to put its patron's name

into the Baghdad sermon is not a school of thought but a competing state. And the court text of 1091 devotes its most vehement chapters to exactly this, classifying the sect as a mortal danger to the realm — though those chapters are precisely the ones modern scholarship most suspects of later interpolation, so their vehemence may belong to a slightly later moment than the vizier's.

The castle

And the policing failed completely, in a way that exposes the whole structure.

On the evening of Wednesday 6 September 1090, five years before the First Crusade was preached and two years before the empire's greatest moment, a Persian missionary named Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ entered the fortress of Alamut in the Alborz mountains. He did not storm it. He had spent months quietly converting its inhabitants, and by the time its Sunni master understood what had happened the castle was no longer his. That method — infiltrate, convert, then reveal — became the movement's standard means of expansion, and it worked because it operated entirely inside the one dimension in which the Seljuk state was blind.

What followed is a catalogue of failures by an empire at its height. Nizām al-Mulk was stabbed near Nahāvand on 14 October 1092 by a young man in the dress of a Sufi. The *qāḍī* of Isfahan, the prefect of Bayhaq and the head of a rival religious order were all killed in the years around 1101–03. Sieges of Alamut became routine: an army would march into the mountains, find the fortresses unassailable, attempt a blockade the terrain made unenforceable, and withdraw. Muhammad Tapar sent a second great effort in 1109 under Nizām al-Mulk's own son and it achieved nothing. The state that could not be beaten in the field could not take one castle in a hundred and sixty years, and the castle killed its ministers at will.

The asymmetry is the point. **The Nizārīs ran an inbound network — converts placed inside courts, garrisons and households, reporting and waiting — and the Seljuks ran an outbound one, the sermon. The dagger beat the pulpit, repeatedly, for a century and a half.** And the ordinary Seljuk answer, when a plot was suspected, was the only answer available to a state with no way of finding out who was who: general massacres of Ismāʿīlī civilians in towns where a killing had occurred, which produced fresh recruits at the same rate.

Reading the seam against the framework

The correction, and it is to a rule this series has used a good deal. Heavy surveillance is normally read as the tell of a belief that never took, and the absence of visible coercion as the measure of a belief that did. This case satisfies neither half cleanly. The belief had taken absolutely — the young man on the boat is the proof — and there was still almost no apparatus of watching; and the reason for its absence was not confidence but a prudential fear of what such an apparatus would do inside the ruling coalition itself.

So the rule needs a third term. **The absence of surveillance can mean the belief took, or that the state could not afford the machinery, or that the ruler feared his own informers more than his enemies.** Only the first is evidence of legitimacy. This case is the third, and it is probably commoner than the literature suggests, because a spy service is an instrument that has to be handed to somebody, and in a coalition of soldiers and secretaries there is no neutral hand.

Which yields the finding. An order's information position should be scored on two axes rather than one: **what it can tell everyone, and what it can find out.** These vary independently, and the Seljuk case is the clean demonstration — maximal broadcast, minimal collection. A state strong on the first and blind on the second can announce its sovereignty to millions every seven days and cannot discover who has converted the garrison of a fortress within a week's ride of its capital.

And such a state has a characteristic killer. Not a rebellion, which is visible and can be met in the field, and not a foreign army, which announces itself. It is the small, disciplined, internally recruited group that lives inside the state's own administrative and household space and is invisible precisely because the state has no organ for looking inward. **A broadcast machine is defenceless against a whisper network**, and the record of this empire's ministers dying one by one at the hands of men who had joined their households is what that defencelessness looks like over a century.

One further note, which the framework should carry. What this order policed and what actually threatened it were not the same thing, and the mismatch is more diagnostic than the volume of policing. It watched the sect and could not see it. It did not watch the succession, the pasture, the assignees or the street, and every one of those did it more damage over the long run than Alamut ever did. **The useful question is not how much a state watches but whether the things it can see include the things that can kill it.**

A note on sources.

The chapter on intelligence agents in the Persian mirror attributed to Nizām al-Mulk, and its complaint that the Seljuk realm alone among Muslim states maintained no such network, is paraphrased from the standard renderings. The text is treated as a court document of about 1091; the final eleven chapters, which contain its most vehement material on the Ismāʿīlīs, are the portion modern scholarship most strongly suspects of later interpolation or of addition by palace scribes, and Hubert Darke's introduction to the standard English edition argues that the second part was almost certainly never seen by Malik-Shāh. The dating of the commission is given as 479/1086 in the manuscript Darke follows and as 484/1091 in another group; both are noted.

The *khuṭba* and the *sikka* as the two acknowledged attributes of Islamic sovereignty, and the *khuṭba*'s function as a weekly simultaneous public naming, follow the standard reference articles by C. E. Bosworth and R. E. Darley-Doran. The reading of it as an outbound instrument to be scored separately from inbound collection is this study's.

Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's entry into Alamut on 6 September 1090 by conversion rather than assault, the assassination of Nizām al-Mulk on 14 October 1092, the killings of the *qāḍī* of Isfahan, the prefect of Bayhaq and the head of the Karrāmiyya between about 1101 and 1103, and the repeated failure of Seljuk sieges including Muhammad Tapar's expedition of 1109 under Aḥmad ibn Nizām al-Mulk, follow Farhad Daftary's account of the Ismāʿīlīs and the general literature. The attribution of Nizām al-Mulk's murder to a Nizārī agent is the standard account, given by Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Khallikān among others; it is contested in the sources, which elsewhere implicate Malik-Shāh and the rival vizier Tāj al-Mulk, and that dispute is noted rather than resolved. Massacres of Ismāʿīlī civilians in reprisal for assassinations are reported in the narrative sources; no figures are given here.

MODULE 8

A BROTHER'S CLAIM PRECEDES A SON'S

Module 8 · elite coordination and the default — an order with a magnificent source of title and no rule of succession, two constitutions held sincerely at once, and the discovery that making a holding heritable multiplies the men entitled to it

The problem, stated at the moment it arises

Picture the armed followers of a ruler on the day he dies, and strip out sentiment.

Each man is deciding whether to reach — for a rival's holdings, or for the top place. His decision does not turn on his loyalty. It turns on his forecast of the others. If he expects them to stand by the existing arrangement and fall on any grabber together, reaching is suicide and he sits still. If he expects them to look to themselves, sitting still is suicide, because the last loyal man ends with nothing. The camp lives or dies on which forecast the armed men share, and in a camp held together by one man's person, his death removes the fixed point that any forecast could settle on.

A source of title outside all the competitors solves this. If every man's holding visibly derives from one authority none of them can seize, an attack on any title is an attack on the ground beneath all of them, and each can predict that the others will combine against a grabber out of the identical self-interest that would move himself. The reach is foreclosed by arithmetic rather than restraint.

The Seljuks had such a source. It was the best-established in the Islamic world, and they had bought its endorsement at length and at price. **And it did not prevent a single one of their succession wars, because it answered a different question.**

Two constitutions, both sincere

The reason is that this dynasty operated under two theories of rule at once, both held in good faith, and no instrument in the world could arbitrate between them.

The first arrived with them from the steppe: sovereignty inheres in the ruling lineage as a body, every adult male of it holds a real share, and the senior man is first among them rather than their sovereign. That is not a folk memory. It is the constitution they

actually practised. After Dandānaqān the victors divided what they had taken and what they had not yet taken — Chaghrī receiving Greater Khurasan, Mūsā Yabghu receiving Herat, Tughril taking the unconquered west — and that is a partition of patrimony among brothers, not a delegation of provinces to governors.

The second was the conception their Persian and Arab chanceries understood and their Islamic titles implied: an office descending from a father to a designated son, indivisible, held by one man.

The clearest statement of the collision is the argument Qāvurt of Kirman made in 1073 against his nephew Malik-Shāh, then about seventeen: **a brother's claim precedes a son's.** He was not being eccentric or opportunistic. He was reciting the constitution the family had operated under since 1040, in which he held a share, against a doctrine of single descent that had never been agreed to. He lost the battle and was killed, and the argument did not die with him, because losing a battle does not settle a constitutional question — it only decides one instance of it.

What the caliph could not say

Now the crucial limitation, and it is a limitation of the instrument rather than of the man holding it.

Al-Māwardī's *Ordinances*, written in the caliph's service in the decade the Seljuks arrived, contains an elaborate law of succession — for the caliphate. It sets out the contract of the imamate, the qualifications of a candidate, the electors, the conditions under which a predecessor may designate a successor, and what happens when two men are contracted with at once. It is a careful and serious body of doctrine.

It has nothing whatever to say about who should succeed a Turkish sultan.

There was no reason it should. The sultanate was a new office, created out of a word, held by a family the law had no purchase on, over a territory the caliph did not administer. The chapter on the amirate of seizure that made the arrangement lawful describes a transaction between a caliph and a man who has already taken a country — and the whole grammar of that transaction requires the taking to have happened first. It is a legal form for ratifying an accomplished fact. **It cannot name the man who will accomplish the next one, because the fact has to precede the ratification or the ratification is worth nothing.**

So the source of title in this order could say who was lawful. It could not say who was next. And a source that authorises whoever has already won is, at a succession, not a restraint on the competitors but a prize to be claimed by the survivor.

Heritability multiplies the claimants

Which produces the mechanism that this module exists to name, and it runs against the intuition that legitimation stabilises.

What an investiture buys, above everything else, is the conversion of a present-tense fact into a future-tense one — a holding that survives the holder, honoured by armed men who could take it and do not. That is the whole point of going to Baghdad. Tughril died childless in 1063 and the office passed to his nephew without the empire dissolving, and that is precisely what warlord bands cannot do.

But a holding that can be inherited is a holding that can be claimed by every man entitled to inherit it — and in a family operating a shared-patrimony constitution, that is all of them. Before the investiture, the question at a chief's death was who could take the camp. After it, the question is who is *entitled* to the sultanate, and entitlement is exactly the sort of thing a claimant can argue about, raise an army over, and take to a caliph for adjudication.

And they did take it to the caliph, which is where the mechanism becomes visible. Rival Seljuks in the succession struggles sought caliphal recognition against one another, and the caliph's power to name one brother rather than another in the Friday sermon made him a participant in the family's civil wars. The instrument bought to convert possession into ownership had become, within a generation, the thing the family fought over, and the man who issued it had become a player in a game he had been chosen for precisely because he could not play.

The record

The pattern is regular enough to set out plainly.

1063. Tughril dies childless. His vizier al-Kundurī attempts to install an infant nephew; Chaghrī's elder and more capable son Alp Arslan takes the throne instead; the vizier is imprisoned on the last day of the year and killed eleven months later.

1072–73. Alp Arslan is killed; his son Malik-Shāh, about seventeen, is challenged by his uncle Qāvurt on the shared-patrimony principle. Malik-Shāh's army is bought men, Kurds and Arabs; Qāvurt's is Turkmen. Qāvurt is defeated and killed.

1092. Nizām al-Mulk is stabbed on 14 October; Malik-Shāh dies on 19 November, five weeks later. His widow Terken Khatun presses the claim of her infant son; his eldest son Berkyaruq is raised by another faction; his uncle Tutush claims from Syria. **The war runs thirteen years.**

1105–1118. Muhammad Tapar reassembles the western sultanate and holds it for thirteen years. The empire does not fall in 1092; it fractures, is refought, and is put back together.

1118–1157. Sanjar, who had governed Khurasan since 1097, holds the senior sultanate for thirty-nine years while the western line passes through a succession of short reigns.

That is not a collapse. It is a constitution working exactly as a constitution with two incompatible clauses works: a war at every transition, resolved by force, and then a period of order until the next death.

The atabeg

The institutional answer to the problem is the clearest demonstration of it, because the answer became the failure.

The device was to give each young prince a province and a guardian-tutor — an *atabeg*, "father-lord" — an experienced Turkish commander who would raise him, command his troops, administer his revenues, and frequently marry his widowed mother. It solves an immediate difficulty: a child cannot govern a province, and the family's constitution requires that he have one.

It also hands a professional soldier the province, the army, the treasury and the household of a boy whose claim he administers. The title's first recorded bestowal was on Nizām al-Mulk himself, which shows how respectable the office began. What it became took two generations: by the 1130s and after, the guardianships were hardening into dynasties in Mosul, Damascus, Azerbaijan and Fārs, with the ward's name on the coins and the guardian's hand on everything else, and eventually not even the name.

The clock matters, because the received account compresses it. Eldigüz was made *atabeg* to an infant prince in 1161 — seventy years after Malik-Shāh's death. The atabeg dynasties are not the immediate consequence of 1092. They are the slow consequence of a constitution that produced a minority claimant every generation and had no way to protect him except by giving a soldier everything except the name.

What the default actually was

Which brings the module to the question that decides how this order should be scored: when nobody was enforcing anything, what did the arrangement fall back to?

Not warlordism. That is the striking fact and it is usually missed. Through a hundred and fifty years of succession wars, fragmentations and reassemblies, **nobody outside the family successfully claimed the sultanate.** Sanjar's own *ghulām*, Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Ay-Aba, ruled most of Khurasan for twenty years after 1154 and did it as an amir under a nominal Seljuk. The atabegs governed as guardians of Seljuk children long after the children were formalities. Seljuk lines ran on in Kirman until 1187, in Iraq until 1194, and in Anatolia until the beginning of the fourteenth century.

The default of this order was **partition among the lineage, with each fragment seeking investiture** — and that is a real and considerable achievement of the source of title, just not the one it is usually credited with. The anchor did not stabilise any particular sultan. It stabilised the *dynasty's monopoly on the office*, by making the sultanate a thing that had to be conferred and conferring it, in practice, only on Seljuks. Every armed man in the system could predict that a non-Seljuk claimant would be resisted by all the others, and none of them tried.

Reading the default against the framework

The finding, and it corrects an expectation this series carries. A source of title outside the competitors is normally credited with foreclosing the scramble at a ruler's death. This case shows that it does no such thing, and shows why.

An instrument of investiture solves the problem of who may hold. It is structurally incapable of solving the problem of who is next, because its whole form is the ratification of an accomplished fact — the seizure must precede the authorisation, or the authorisation is merely the issuer's preference and worth nothing. A source of title that could name successors in advance would be a source of title with a will of its own, which is precisely the property that would destroy its value.

Worse, the instrument makes the succession problem larger rather than smaller. What it buys is heritability — the conversion of a present-tense holding into one that survives its holder. But every man entitled to inherit is now a lawful claimant rather than merely an armed one, and where the family's own constitution vests a share in every adult male, the investiture converts a scramble among the strong into a legal dispute among the many, fought with armies. **The device that turns possession into ownership multiplies the number of people who own.**

And the issuer is drawn into the fight. A caliph who could name a brother in the sermon was a caliph worth capturing, which is one route by which an office chosen for its harmlessness begins to be handled as a participant — and a participant, as the module on the robe predicted, is a thing that can eventually be attacked.

The second finding, which is what the case gives in place of what it withholds. Score this order on the wrong question — did the anchor prevent the scramble — and it fails completely. Score it on what actually happened and something considerable appears. **A source of title with no succession rule does not fail to solve the coordination problem; it solves it one level up, at the lineage rather than the person.** It makes the dynasty uncontestable and every succession within the dynasty a war. That is not nothing: it is the difference between an empire that fragments into pieces all of which still acknowledge one family, and a country that dissolves into whoever holds a fort. Iran and Iraq after 1092 got the first, for a century, and the men who governed the pieces spent seventy years insisting they were guardians rather than kings.

The cost of that settlement is where it should be looked for. Every generation, an internal war; every internal war fought over the districts whose assessments paid for it; and every minority producing a soldier with a province he did not have to give back. The order bought dynastic continuity at the price of periodic civil war, and paid the price out of the countryside.

A note on sources.

The partition of 1040 between Chaghrī in Khurasan, Mūsā Yabghu at Herat and Tughril in the west follows A. C. S. Peacock; the reading of it as a division of patrimony rather than a delegation of provinces, and its connection to Qāvurt's claim of 1073, is this study's. The characterisation of the steppe conception of sovereignty as vested in the lineage rather than the person is standard in the literature on Turkic and Mongol polities and is applied here rather than argued.

Al-Māwardī's treatment of the contract of the imamate, its electors, qualifications and the problem of two simultaneous contracts occupies the opening chapters of *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya*; that his work contains no corresponding law for the succession of a sultan is an observation about its contents, not a citation.

Dates: Tughril dies 4 October 1063, al-Kundurī imprisoned 31 December 1063 and executed 29 November 1064; Alp Arslan dies in 1072 and Qāvurt is defeated and killed in 1073; Nizām al-Mulk killed 14 October 1092 and Malik-Shāh dead 19 November 1092; the succession war running to Muhammad Tapar's establishment on 13 February 1105 and his reign to 18 April 1118; Sanjar in Khurasan from 1097 and holding the senior sultanate from 1118 to 8 May 1157. Seljuk lines in Kirman to 1187, in Iraq to 1194, and in Anatolia into the fourteenth century.

On the *atabeg*: that the title was first bestowed on Nizām al-Mulk, and that Eldigüz was appointed guardian to the infant Arslan in 1161, are as reported in the standard

reference literature; the atabeg dynasties of Mosul, Damascus, Azerbaijan and Fārs are conventionally dated from the 1120s onward. The argument that the institution's failure clock is slower than the received account suggests is this study's.

That rival Seljuk claimants sought caliphal recognition against one another during the succession struggles is reported in the narrative sources; no single episode is relied on here, and the inference that this drew the caliphate into the family's wars as a participant is this study's.

Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Ay-Aba's rule over much of Khurasan from about 1154 until his death in 1174, as a former *ghulām* of Sanjar nominally subordinate to the Seljuks, follows C. E. Bosworth.

MODULE 9

MUST NOT BE PREVENTED

Module 9 · plurality or foreclosure — the counterweights this order did not own, why nobody had designed any of them, and the exact line below which none of them reached

What the apex did not own

Take an inventory of the things a sultan of this empire could not control, and it is longer than for any order examined in this series so far.

He did not own the licence to teach and to give legal opinions. It was granted by one named master to one named student, on no formal criteria, by a man nobody could compel. He could build the hall and pay the professor and specify the school in the deed, and the piece of authority that actually mattered passed between two people in a room he had no standing in.

He did not own the endowments. They were instruments of the private law, alienated in perpetuity to a purpose specified by a founder, administered under the supervision of judges he did not appoint. He could tax them or seize them, as later states did, at the price of a conspicuous public act of expropriation justified in the language of the men being expropriated.

He did not own the schools. There were four of them, each with its own law, its own chains of transmission, its own endowed houses and its own factional geography in every city. None could be abolished. A scholar who lost a patron in one had three others and a dozen cities.

He did not own the courts. The chief judge of Baghdad was appointed by the caliph, and a caliph with nothing else left had drawn his one line at the sale of that office.

He did not own the source of his own title. That is the subject of the third module and needs no repeating except to note where it belongs in this list: the most important single thing in the order, deliberately kept in the hands of a man who could not use it.

He did not own the street. The Ḥanbalīs of Baghdad broke up music, destroyed wine, and drove a professor of law to a public recantation in 1072 without asking anyone's permission; the common people joined their riots; and the head of the sultan's

own college went to their leader to ask for calm and was quietly refused.

He did not own the money. A wealthy Ḥanbalī merchant could fund a chair at the mosque of al-Manṣūr, keep a persecuted scholar in his household, and be a confidant of the caliph, all at once.

And he did not own the exits. After September 1090 there was a functioning territorial alternative in the Alborz for anyone prepared to take the doctrine with it.

Nobody built any of it

Here is what should be said about that list before anything else: **not one item on it was designed to be a check on anybody.**

The personal licence was not a liberty granted by a ruler. It was the technical form that scholarly authority happened to take when the schools of law crystallised in the ninth century, and it produced independence as a by-product of being a transaction between two individuals. The endowment was not a constitutional device. It was a charitable instrument of the private law, and its immunity to casual defunding is a side-effect of the founder's power to bind his own property in perpetuity. The four schools were not a separation of powers. They were the residue of two centuries of argument, frozen into a settlement in this very century by a consensus that any fifth would be error.

That matters enormously and it is the module's first finding. **A right that was granted has an author, and an author can withdraw it.** Every liberty in this series that took the form of a charter, a privilege, a concession or a constitutional guarantee has been vulnerable at exactly the point where it was strongest — that somebody with standing had conferred it, and therefore somebody with standing could revoke it. The protections in this order had no author. There was no document to repeal, no grant to rescind, no assembly to dissolve. To end the independence of the *ʿulamāʾ*, a sultan would have had to change what a licence *was*, in a civilisation where he had no authority over the question at all.

The most durable counterweight in an order is often the one nobody chose — arising from the technical form of an institution rather than from anyone's intention that it should restrain power — because it presents no author to be pressured and no instrument to be cancelled.

What a subject could actually do

Now the harder half, which is to ask what any of this was worth to a person with a grievance. The answer varies by station so sharply that a single answer would be a lie.

A scholar had genuine recourse. He could move to another school, another patron, another city, another country; he could withhold his licence; he could write, and be read, and outlive the men who had silenced him. Al-Juwaynī, driven out of Khurasan by a vizier's persecution, taught for four years at Mecca and Medina and came back to a chair when the vizier had been strangled. Al-Ghazālī abandoned the most valuable position in the Islamic world on a point of conscience and lost nothing that mattered to him. That is real liberty, and it existed because the thing that made these men what they were had not been issued by anybody who could take it back.

A townsman had less, and it was collective rather than individual. He could join a school and a quarter, and quarters had leaders, funds, mosques and the capacity to put several thousand angry men into a street. He could take a case to the judge, and the judges were not the sultan's men. He could take a case to the ruler's own grievance court, the *maẓālim*, which was a real institution with real hearings. He could riot, and rioting worked — it broke Ibn ʿAqīl, and it repeatedly forced the state to abandon appointments and reverse policies. What he could not do was any of it alone.

A cultivator had the fourth prescription of the court manual: *any subject who wishes to bring his case to the ruler must not be prevented*.

Which is a confession that he was being prevented, and it is the whole of what the record offers him. He had no school with an endowment, no quarter with a mosque and a purse, no portable skill, no literacy, and no castle. He had a legal claim — the assignee had no right to anything beyond the assessment — and no institution whose business it was to enforce it on his behalf. His practical remedies were flight, which was ruinous in an irrigated country and left the land worse, and complaint, which required travelling to a court held by the man whose commander was taking the money.

The plurality that made this order remarkable stopped at the town wall.

The exit, and what it cost

The Nizārīs belong here rather than only in the module on suppression, because they are the case's answer to the question of what a person did when the crowded seam still gave him nothing.

Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's movement offered what no school and no endowment could: a different answer to every layer of the stack at once, an organisation that recruited by

conviction rather than by patronage, a doctrine that made its adherents' obedience owed elsewhere, and after 1090 a territory. Men joined it who had every worldly reason not to, and died for it in ways that only make sense if the belief was real.

And the price of that exit tells you how narrow the door was. **To leave this order's settlement you had to take a mountain fortress, and then hold it against every army the empire could send, for a hundred and sixty years.** Nothing less would do, because there was no lawful ground on which a man could stand outside the arrangement. The Nizārī state is evidence of plurality and evidence of its limits in the same object: a real alternative existed, and the entry fee was a castle.

The order's response to that exit is also part of the accounting. When a killing occurred, the standard reprisal was a general massacre of Ismāʿīlī civilians in the nearest town — people who had taken no castle and killed nobody, punished for a doctrine, by a state that had no way of finding out who was who.

Reading liberty against the framework

The first finding, stated as a general proposition because the case supports it and other cases can test it. The counterweights that lasted in this order were the ones nobody had authored. The personal licence, the private-law endowment, the four-school settlement: none was intended as a check on rulers, all functioned as one, and all proved more durable than any granted liberty in this series — because **a protection that arises from the technical form of an institution has no author to be pressured, no grant to be rescinded, and no ceremony of revocation available.** Where a liberty exists as a concession, the question is always what it would cost the ruler to withdraw it. Where a liberty exists as a by-product of how an institution happens to work, the ruler would have to change what the institution *is*, in front of the very people whose cooperation he needs, and there is usually no procedure by which he could even attempt it.

The corollary is uncomfortable for reformers and worth stating anyway: **liberties designed as liberties are the fragile kind.** The robust kind are structural accidents, and they cannot be manufactured to order, because the moment they are manufactured they acquire an author.

The second finding, which is the corrective the case demands. It would be easy to read the inventory above and conclude that this was an unusually free order. It was an unusually free order *for about one person in twenty*.

Plurality is a property of a class before it is a property of a society. Every counterweight listed in this module required something the majority did not have: literacy, membership of an institution, an organised quarter, a portable and licensable

skill, a wealthy patron, or a fortress. The crowded seam protected the men who could reach the seam. The cultivator of the Sawād lived under the same sultan, the same law and the same faith, and the crowding did nothing for him whatever — not because he was excluded by a rule but because none of the instruments were shaped to be reached from where he stood.

So the useful question about plurality is not how many counterweights exist but how far down the order the nearest one reaches. A society with four schools of law, an untouchable class of jurists, an unbuyable credential, an unarmed pope-equivalent, an armed street and a functioning territorial exit can still be, for the men who grow its food, an order in which the only available remedies are running away and a sentence in a manual saying that they must not be prevented from complaining.

A note on sources.

The personal character of the *ijāzat al-tadrīs wa'l-iftā'*, and its consequent immunity from state or founder control, follows George Makdisi and is set out with its sources in the module on formation. The character of the *waqf* as an instrument of the private law, and the practical limits of that character, are treated in the module on the cost column. The four-school settlement and the closing of the field in the eleventh century follow the current scholarship on the making of Sunnism, principally Ahmad Khan's.

The caliph's appointment of the chief *qāḍī* of Baghdad and al-Muṭīʿ's resistance to the farming of that office between 961 and 963 are treated in the landscape. The *maẓālim* jurisdiction is described at length by al-Māwardī in *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya* and is standard.

The Ḥanbalī street under the Sharīf Abū Jaʿfar al-Hāshimī, the participation of the *ʿāmma* in its rioting, Ibn ʿAqīl's recantation of September 1072, and Abū Isḥāq al-Shīrāzī's unsuccessful approaches to the Sharīf are documented in the module on formation. Abū Manṣūr ibn Yūsuf's position as a wealthy Ḥanbalī merchant, patron of Ibn ʿAqīl and confidant of al-Qā'im follows Makdisi.

Al-Juwaynī's years in the Ḥijāz and return, and al-Ghazālī's abandonment of the Baghdad chair in 1095, are treated in earlier modules. The four provisions of the chapter on assignees in the court text of about 1091, including that appeals to the ruler must not be prevented, are paraphrased from the standard renderings.

Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's seizure of Alamut on 6 September 1090 and the subsequent Nizārī state follow Farhad Daftary. Reprisal massacres of Ismāʿīlī civilians are reported in the narrative sources; no figures are given, and the sources reporting them are hostile to the victims.

The proposition that unauthored protections outlast granted ones is this study's, offered as a generalisation to be tested rather than as an established finding; the observation that every counterweight enumerated here required a resource the cultivating majority lacked is a reading of the evidence assembled in this module and is likewise the study's own.

MODULE 10

THE LIBRARIES AT NISHAPUR

Module 10 · change and collapse — an empire at its greatest extent in the year a missionary took a castle, a caliph who armed himself and was killed for it, and the founding army coming back for the endowments

The peak and the crack, in the same years

The Seljuk empire was largest, richest and most orderly under Malik-Shāh, and the instruments of its undoing were all in place before he died.

On the evening of Wednesday 6 September 1090, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ walked into the fortress of Alamut, which he had spent months converting from the inside, and made it the seat of a state the empire would never enter. Two years later, on 14 October 1092, Nizām al-Mulk was stabbed near Nahāvand on the road to Baghdad by a young man dressed as a Sufi. Five weeks after that, on 19 November, Malik-Shāh died at Baghdad. The vizier who had run the administration for twenty-eight years and the sultan who had held the whole of it were gone inside six weeks, and the castle that had killed the first was still there.

What followed was not a collapse but a thirteen-year war. Malik-Shāh's widow pressed her infant son's claim; his eldest son Berkyaruq was raised by another faction; his uncle Tutush claimed from Syria; and the districts whose assessments paid for all of it were fought across until 1105, when Muhammad Tapar established a reunified western sultanate and held it for another thirteen years. Sanjar, who had governed Khurasan since 1097, took the senior sultanate in 1118 and held it for thirty-nine years.

So the standard picture — the empire disintegrating in 1092 — is wrong by two generations. It fractured, was refought, was reassembled, and ran on. What changed permanently in 1092 was not the map but the arithmetic: from that year forward there was a permanent internal enemy the state could not find, a succession dispute every generation, and a class of soldier-guardians accumulating provinces that belonged to children.

The caliph acquires an army

And there was one more change, which this study predicted from the mechanism and which the record delivers on schedule.

The office in Baghdad had been worth having precisely because it had nothing. An issuer with no soldiers cannot be suspected of issuing in his own interest, cannot be produced by any competitor, and cannot be pressured by one, because he has nothing to lose but his life. That was the specification, and for two centuries it held.

From about 1120 the caliphs began to violate it.

Al-Mustarshid, caliph from 1118, raised troops, took territory in Iraq, and behaved as a territorial ruler. In 1135 he took the field in person against his own sultan, Masʿūd, near Hamadhān. He was defeated, taken, and shortly afterwards murdered. His son al-Rāshid refused the reparations demanded of him, was besieged in Baghdad, and was deposed in 1138. Al-Muqtafī, raised in his place, spent his reign completing what his predecessors had begun: he took Ḥilla, Kūfa, Wāsiṭ and Tikrīt, built a caliphal army out of purchased soldiers of his own, and in 1157 held Baghdad against a Seljuk siege. From that year the caliph of Baghdad was militarily independent of any sultan.

Read that sequence against the instrument and it is exact. For a hundred and eighty years no sultan and no amīr had contemplated killing a caliph, because a caliph was the ground they stood on and there was no advantage in breaking it. Within seventeen years of the caliphate acquiring an army, one caliph had been defeated in the field and murdered and another besieged and deposed. **The moment the author of title armed himself he stopped being the ground the armed men stood on and became one of the armed men — and became, for the first time in two centuries, a thing that could be attacked.**

That it went on to succeed does not soften the point; it sharpens it, because of how it succeeded. Al-Nāṣir, caliph from 1180, did not defeat the Seljuks with the caliphal army. He encouraged the Khwārazmshāh Tekish to do it, and Tekish defeated and killed the last Seljuk sultan of Iraq, Tughril III, in 1194, afterwards handing the caliph territory the Seljuks had held. The office that had once sold authorisations to men with armies had learned to hire one.

The founding army comes back

The end in the east came from the direction nobody was watching, and it is the sharpest single image in the case.

In 548/1153 an army of Oghuz Turkmen — newly arrived from the steppe, the same people whose great-grandfathers had followed Seljuq out of Jand — defeated Sanjar near Balkh and took him prisoner. He was seventy-odd, had lost control of his own magnates, and was held for three years. He escaped in the autumn of 1156 and died at Merv in the spring of 1157.

While he was in their hands, the Turkmen overran Khurasan without opposition. In 1153 they sacked Nishapur, destroying among much else its mosques, its madrasas and its libraries, and driving the population out to the suburb of Shādyākh.

Hold the two ends of that against each other. Nishapur is where Tughril had the Friday sermon read in his own name in 1038, before he had an empire. Nishapur is where the endowed college had already existed for two generations before Nizām al-Mulk built his own there. Nishapur is where al-Juwaynī came home to a chair when the persecution ended, and where Bulliet counted three dozen madrasas in the century of the conquest. **The men who burned its libraries in 1153 were the same kind of men, out of the same country, following the same grass, as the men who had won the empire at Dandānaqān in 1040 — and they burned it because the empire had never had anything to pay them with.**

The province was then held together, for twenty years, by Mu'ayyid al-Dīn Ay-Aba, who drove the Turkmen out, fortified Shādyākh, and ruled most of Khurasan until his death in 1174 under a nominal Seljuk. Ay-Aba had been Sanjar's *ghulām*. **The bought army outlasted the dynasty that bought it, and governed what was left in the name of a family it had been purchased to protect from that family's own tribesmen.**

Who actually ended it

Set out the agents of this order's destruction in order and a pattern appears that ought to be stated plainly.

The **brothers and uncles**, whose claims the family's own constitution guaranteed and the caliph's investiture made lawful.

The **guardians**, invented to protect the children those claims produced, who turned the guardianships into dynasties.

The **Nizārīs**, who recruited by conviction inside a state with no organ for looking inward, took a castle it could not enter, and killed its ministers for a century and a half.

The **Turkmen**, the founding army, never paid, exported when the pasture failed, who came back in 1153 and burned the schools.

The **bought soldiers**, who inherited the provinces when the family could no longer hold them.

And the **caliph**, who had sold the authorisations, armed himself, was defeated and murdered for it in 1135, recovered, and in 1194 arranged the killing of the last sultan by another man's army.

Not one of those is the ruled. **The cultivators of the Sawād and the Jibāl — the most heavily extracted, least protected, worst-served people in the empire — are not agents of its fall at any point in a hundred and fifty years.** They neither rose nor were relieved. They were the surface across which every one of these contests was fought, and they appear in the record of the collapse only as the country somebody's army was moving through.

Reading the collapse against the framework

The finding, and it is the one this module is for. An order's destruction should be sought among the parties it left outside its own settlement, not among the parties it oppressed. Those are different lists, and this case separates them with unusual clarity.

The oppressed were the cultivators, and they did nothing, because they had nothing to do it with — no institution, no literacy, no organisation, no arms and nowhere to go. **Oppression alone produces no agency; it produces the absence of it.** What produces agency is being *outside a settlement while retaining a capacity* — and every party that damaged this order fits that description exactly. The Turkmen had cavalry and no assignment. The Nizārīs had conviction, organisation and a mountain, and no place in the arrangement at all. The atabegs had armies and provinces and no legitimate title. The caliph had the power to authorise and, once he bought soldiers, the power to act. Each was a party the order had itself created, or had itself failed to pay, and each retained the means to make that failure expensive.

So the diagnostic is a two-part test rather than a grievance count. **Ask who has been left out of the settlement, and then ask which of them kept something.** The intersection of those two lists is the order's collapse, written in advance.

And the prediction from the third module, tested and held. A source of title that acquires the capacity to enforce converts itself into a claimant and forfeits the immunity that made it worth going to. The caliphate had been physically untouchable for two centuries while it was harmless. Within a generation of arming itself, one caliph was killed in the field by his own sultan and his successor was deposed. The office survived, and eventually won — but it won by hiring somebody else's army rather than by using its own, which is to say that even in victory it was operating on the discovery its own losses had taught it.

A note on sources.

Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ's entry into Alamut on 6 September 1090 follows the standard accounts; the assassination of Nizām al-Mulk on 14 October 1092 is attributed to a Nizārī agent by Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Khallikān, with the sources elsewhere implicating Malik-Shāh and Tāj al-Mulk, a dispute noted here and not resolved. Malik-Shāh died 19 November 1092. The succession war to 1105, Muhammad Tapar's reign from 13 February 1105 to 18 April 1118, Sanjar in Khurasan from 1097 and holding the senior sultanate from 1118 to 8 May 1157, are as reported in the standard chronology.

The caliphal recovery follows the modern scholarship on the twelfth-century caliphate: al-Mustarshid from 1118, his defeat near Hamadhān and murder in 1135; al-Rāshid's refusal of reparations, the fifty-day siege of Baghdad and his deposition in 1136–38, with the dating varying slightly between accounts; al-Muqtafī's conquest of Ḥilla, Kūfa, Wāsiṭ and Tikrīt and the successful defence of Baghdad against the Seljuk siege of 1157. Al-Nāṣir's reign from 28 March 1180 to 5 October 1225, his encouragement of Tekish against Tughril III, and Tughril's defeat and death in 1194 followed by Tekish's cession of territory to the caliph, follow the standard accounts.

Sanjar's defeat and capture by Oghuz Turkmen near Balkh in 548/1153, his captivity until his escape in 551/1156 and death in the spring of 552/1157, follow Ibn al-Athīr as reported in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*'s article on Khurasan, which also gives the fragmentation of the province and the Ismāʿīlī offensive of 549/1154. The sack of Nishapur in 1153, with the destruction of mosques including the Manīʿī, madrasas and libraries, and the flight of the population to Shādyākh, follows the *Iranica* article on Nishapur, which likewise records Muʾayyid al-Dīn Ay-Aba's expulsion of the Oghuz, his fortification of Shādyākh and his rule over much of Khurasan until 1174. That Ay-Aba had been Sanjar's *ghulām* is standard.

The identification of the 1153 Oghuz as newly arrived from the steppe rather than as long-settled Seljuk subjects is Ibn al-Athīr's, as reported in *Iranica*; the reading offered here — that they were the same kind of constituency, unpayable in the same way, as the men who won Dandānaqān — is this study's inference and not a claim of descent. The two-part diagnostic proposed in the closing section is likewise this study's.

MODULE 11

THE CALENDAR AND THE CANAL

Module 11 · the grim accounting — two columns that do not net, and a record that survives in the materials the winners used

The first column

Set down what this order made, at its own valuation, without shaving it.

A century of unified rule. From Dandānaqān in 1040 to Malik-Shāh's death in 1092, one government held the country from the Oxus to the borders of Syria. Nothing had done that since the ninth century. Roads were policed, caravans moved, and the sources hostile to the dynasty and friendly to it agree that Malik-Shāh's reign was orderly and prosperous.

The endowed college, at scale. Free tuition, stipends, housing, libraries; recruitment of men without family; foundations at Baghdad, Nishapur, Isfahan, Herat, Balkh and beyond. The model spread far past the empire that funded it: Cairo would eventually count seventy-five madrasas, Damascus fifty-one, Aleppo a comparable number. The institution that carried Islamic law and learning for the next eight hundred years took its recognisable public form in the decades this study covers, and Seljuk money is a substantial part of why.

The men. Al-Juwaynī returned from exile to a chair. Al-Ghazālī held the Baghdad chair at thirty-three and wrote, in the years after he left it, the synthesis that brought Sufism inside the law and shaped Sunni piety permanently. Al-Shahrastānī taught at the Baghdad house in 1116. Whatever the state's ownership of these men — and the answer, established earlier, is that it had none — it housed and paid a great many of them.

The calendar. In 1079 an astronomical commission funded by Malik-Shāh, on which Omar Khayyām served, produced a solar calendar of an accuracy Europe would not match for five hundred years.

And the settlement itself. For a century and a half the Islamic world ran on an arrangement in which one man held the power to compel and another the power to authorise, and neither destroyed the other. That arrangement outlived the Seljuks, was copied by every subsequent Sunni dynasty, and is a large part of how Sunni Islam survived the permanent loss of political unity without losing its account of lawful rule.

The second column

Now the other side, and it should be entered in the same voice.

The land. The Sawād's ruin was inherited rather than caused, but the extraction system installed over it guaranteed that no party in the chain — not the state three weeks away, not the assignee expecting rotation in three or four years, not the cultivator with no title anyone would defend — had a reason to repair anything. The Nahrawān was breached in 937 or 938 and stayed breached. There is no register of what that did to the people who had farmed beside it.

The cultivator's position. His surplus was assigned to a cavalryman by a document neither he nor anyone acting for him had any part in. The state's own manual instructed assignees to take nothing beyond the assessment, to leave the subjects secure afterwards, and not to obstruct appeals — which is a record of what was being done rather than a record of protection.

Ani, 1064. The Armenian cleric Aristakes Lastivertsi, writing within a decade, describes the walls holding, the garrison breaking, and the attackers coming over. His judgement on what followed is one line: putting the Persian sword to work, they spared no one.

Anatolia. The westward movement that relieved the pasture problem was, for the Greek and Armenian populations of the Anatolian plateau, a generation of raiding followed by displacement, and the Byzantine civil war that followed Manzikert removed whatever protection had remained.

The Ismāʿīlīs. When an assassination occurred, the standard reprisal was a general massacre of Ismāʿīlī civilians in the nearest town — people who had taken no castle and killed nobody, punished for a doctrine by a state that had no means of identifying anyone.

The succession wars. Thirteen years from 1092, and a war at every transition afterwards, fought across the districts whose assessments paid for them.

Nishapur, 1153. Mosques, madrasas and libraries destroyed by Turkmen; the population out in the suburbs. The endowments in the first column and the ashes in the second are, in that city, the same buildings.

Why the record is biased, and in which direction

There is a structural fact about this accounting that ought to be stated before anyone attempts to weigh the columns.

Every item in the first column is made of paper or stone in a city. Almost every item in the second was borne in the countryside, or by a group nobody was writing for.

The calendar survives because it was computed by men who wrote. The madrasas survive in deeds, biographical dictionaries and the careers of their graduates, because their beneficiaries were the class that produced the sources. The books survive because copying them was a profession. The order's achievements are, without exception, in the media that keep.

The costs are not. There is no document from a cultivator of the Sawād. There is no assessment of what the loss of the Nahrawān meant to the households along it. The massacres of Ismāʿīlī townsmen are reported by their enemies and without numbers. Ani has one line, from a churchman who believed the disaster was his own people's fault. The Turkmen who revolted over grazing in 1058 left no statement of their grievance except through Persian secretaries who despised them.

So an honest accounting has to include the observation that **the surviving evidence is a biased sample of the effects, biased toward the classes that could write and could build in durable materials** — which are the classes an endowed-college order serves best. The impression of a brilliant century is not false. It is the impression the sources were made to give, by the people the century was good to.

And they do not net

The temptation is to reach a verdict, and the discipline of this series is to refuse.

It is not the case that the colleges compensate for the canal, or that the calendar offsets Ani, because those are not commensurable quantities and the people who bore the costs are not the people who received the benefits. The cultivator whose assessment paid the cavalryman who rode to Manzikert did not get a chair at the Nizāmiyya, and neither did his sons.

More than that: **the two columns are not independent items to be weighed but the same transaction seen from two ends.** The endowed colleges were funded out of the revenue system that gave nobody an interest in the land. The unified century was maintained by an army paid out of assessments that were being collected by men who expected to be moved on within four years. The intellectual efflorescence of the eleventh century and the erosion of the agricultural base that supported it are not a good thing and a bad thing that happened at the same time. They are a single arrangement, working.

Explaining that arrangement is not softening it. The mechanism examined in this study is precisely the mechanism by which force becomes lawful, and lawful

extraction is worse than the other kind rather than better, because it is durable, because it can be defended in the language of the people it takes from, and because it produces no scandal. The Seljuk order's greatest achievement was to make itself normal. That is the finding and it is also the charge.

Reading the accounting against the framework

The proposition. An order's visible legacy is a biased sample of its effects, and the bias runs in a predictable direction: **toward whatever the order's beneficiaries recorded in materials that keep.** Colleges, calendars, coins, chancery documents, biographical dictionaries and domed tombs are the residue of literate urban classes. Silted canals, abandoned tillage, displaced villages and dead townsmen are the residue of everyone else, and they leave no residue at all.

The corrective is not to guess at the missing numbers, which would be worse than saying nothing. It is to **record the shape of the absence**, so that the reader knows the ledger is short on one side by an amount nobody can compute. This study has therefore given no figures for the population of the Sawād, the casualties at Ani, the dead in the reprisal massacres, the losses at Nishapur, or the number of cultivators under assignment, because the material does not support them — and has said so in every module rather than filling the gaps.

And the second proposition, which follows from the first and is harder. Where an order's achievements are funded by its extraction, the two cannot be entered as separate lines and netted, because they are one line. This is not an argument that the achievements are void; the calendar was more accurate, the colleges did teach, al-Ghazālī did write. It is an argument that **the ledger's form is wrong**, and that a case study which reaches a verdict by weighing columns has already accepted the framing of the party that kept the books.

MODULE 12

AN OFFICE THEY COULD HAVE TAKEN ANY MORNING

Module 12 · convergence and divergence — the same argument fought in Latin Christendom in the same decades, why one side could win it and the other could not, and the strongest case for the Seljuks, stated in full and answered

The same problem, in two civilisations, in the same generation

While al-Māwardī was writing in Baghdad about how a man who had seized a country by force could be made lawful, the Latin west was beginning the same argument and would take two centuries over it.

In 1075 Gregory VII issued the propositions known as the *Dictatus Papae*, asserting among other things that the pope alone might depose emperors. In January 1077 the Emperor Henry IV stood outside the castle at Canossa to obtain absolution. In 1122 the Concordat of Worms settled a form of words by which the emperor renounced investiture with ring and staff and retained a role in elections. Between those dates the Latin church produced an enormous legal literature on exactly the question the Islamic east had been working on since the 930s: who authorises whom, and what is left to the man with the army.

The convergence is real and it is not a coincidence of dates. **Two civilisations, independently, in the same century, discovered that the power to compel and the power to authorise could be lodged in different men, and both spent generations working out the terms.** In both, an unarmed religious authority found that its endorsement had a price because the armed men could not manufacture it themselves. In both, the armed men paid, at cost, repeatedly, and went on paying.

But the two cases then run in opposite directions, and the divergence is where the study's findings show.

The first divergence: one was arming, the other had disarmed

Gregory VII's papacy was an authority *acquiring* a floor. It allied with the Normans of southern Italy, deployed excommunication as a weapon with material consequences, built a legal apparatus with jurisdiction, and within twenty years of Gregory's death had invented an army of its own in the crusade. It was an anchor growing a sword.

The Abbasid caliphate was an authority that had *had* a sword and lost it — at Samarra in the ninth century, definitively in 936 — and whose entire value in the eleventh century consisted in that loss. The two institutions passed each other going in opposite directions.

And they arrived, from opposite sides, at the same discovery, which is this study's central prediction. **An authority that arms itself becomes a party.** Gregory VII died in exile at Salerno, driven from Rome by the emperor he had absolved at Canossa, protected by Normans whose protection had sacked the city. Al-Mustarshid, the first Abbasid caliph in two centuries to take the field, was defeated by his own sultan near Hamadhān in 1135 and murdered. Neither outcome is a coincidence of personality. Both are what happens when the man everyone was standing on picks up a weapon and joins the fight — at which point his rulings stop being the ground and become his position.

The second divergence: where the licence lived

The deeper difference is the one this study's fourth module identified, and it explains why the Latin argument was winnable and the Islamic one was not.

A Christian priest is made by ordination, performed by a bishop, whose own authority derives from a church with a hierarchy, a legal system, and a centre. The credential is **institutional**. Which means it can be captured — and the whole Investiture Controversy is a fight over exactly that capture, between two parties each of whom believed that whoever controlled the making of bishops controlled the church. There was something there to win.

An Islamic scholar was made by a licence granted by one named master to one named student, on no formal criteria, by a man nobody could compel, in a chain running back through named individuals. The credential was **personal**. There was no centre to capture, no hierarchy to seize, no appointment power to fight over, and consequently no Investiture Controversy in Islam — not because the question did not arise but because **there was nothing to contest.** No caliph ever controlled the *ʿulamāʾ*;

no sultan ever could; and the vizier who spent a fortune on colleges bought their premises and their gratitude and never their licence.

That single structural difference propagates a long way. It is why the Latin church could be centralised in the twelfth century and captured by states in the sixteenth, at the Reformation, in a way the *'ulamā'* never were. It is why Sunni Islam has no ecclesiology and no schism in the European sense, and equally no institution capable of speaking for it. **A credential that lives in persons cannot be seized and cannot be organised**, and both halves of that have been true for a thousand years.

The strongest case for them, stated in its own voice

Here is the counter-position, put as its best advocate would put it, without softening.

You have written a study about what the Seljuks could not do. Consider what they did.

They found the Islamic east in pieces. A caliph who had been the prisoner of one warlord family or another for a hundred and ten years, blinded twice within living memory, living on a stipend a general could stop. A rival caliphate in Cairo advancing eastward with money and missionaries, which within four years of Tughril's arrival had put its own name in the Baghdad pulpit for forty Fridays and prepared a palace for the Abbasid it expected to receive in chains. An agriculture that had been failing for a century and a half. And a Sunni world that did not yet know what Sunnism was, in which the founder of the sultans' own school of law had been, within scholarly memory, a heretic.

Within thirty years they removed the Buyids, expelled the Fatimid claimant, restored the caliph to his own city, and reunified Iran and Iraq under a single government for the first time since the ninth century. They opened Anatolia. They took the endowed college — an obscure Khurasani institution — and made it an imperial one, free, stipended, open to men without family, and copied it across the Islamic world until Cairo had seventy-five and Damascus fifty-one, so that Islamic learning had a home for the next eight hundred years. They housed and paid the men who wrote the books Sunni Islam still runs on. They funded a calendar more accurate than Europe's would be for five centuries.

And in a hundred and fifty years, holding overwhelming military superiority over an unarmed old man in a palace they could enter at will, they never once took his office. Compare the Christian emperors of the same century, who could not manage a comparable restraint for a decade. Measure the Seljuks against what came before them and what came after, not against a standard no dynasty in history has met.

The answer

Most of that is true, and each true part needs a specific answer rather than a general one.

The restoration was already running. The Sunni recovery in Baghdad began about half a century before the Seljuks arrived, driven by a class of traditionalists and by a caliph who had spent forty years defining a creed, requiring subscription to it, and denouncing the Fatimid genealogy — from inside a Shīʿī amīr's city, with no army. The Seljuks arrived into a programme and were credited with founding it.

The college was already there. Nishapur held something like three dozen madrasas before the Seljuks, endowed by private citizens, and Tughril sponsored one before Nizām al-Mulk held office. What the vizier added was scale, official patronage and a stipulated school — considerable, and not an invention.

The unification lasted thirty-seven years before a thirteen-year civil war, then thirteen more, then a war at every transition thereafter.

Anatolia's opening was permitted, not designed. The westward movement relieved a pasture problem the state could not otherwise solve, and the sultans took credit for a migration they could not have stopped. For the people living on the plateau it was a generation of raiding and displacement.

The men were never theirs. Al-Ghazālī walked out of the most valuable chair in the empire in 1095 and took his authority with him, because none of what made him had been issued by the man who paid him. That is a considerable thing to have funded and a poor thing to claim.

And the calendar and the canal belong to the same order. The commission that computed the year to five decimal places was funded out of a revenue system in which nobody from the sultan to the headman had an interest in whether a canal was dredged. Both are theirs.

Now the restraint, which is the strongest item and needs the most care.

It is true and it is remarkable. No sultan took the caliph's office, and neither had the Shīʿī dynasty before them with every doctrinal reason to. But this study's whole argument is that the restraint was structural rather than moral. They could not take the office because taking it would have destroyed what they wanted from it: an authorisation issued by a man who could not have issued it in his own interest. The instant a sultan held the caliphate, his investiture would have become his own say-so, which he already had for nothing.

And here is the honest concession, which should be the last thing this study says about them.

Naming that as structure does not diminish it. It raises it. **A restraint that holds for a hundred and fifty years because it is built into the arithmetic is worth incomparably more than one that depends on the character of each successive ruler**, because characters vary and arithmetic does not. The Christian emperors of the same century failed at the equivalent test not because they were worse men but because their church had a centre worth seizing, and seizing it *worked* — an emperor who controlled the making of bishops got something real, whereas a sultan who took the caliphate would have got nothing.

So the fair statement is this. The Seljuks were not more virtuous than their contemporaries. They were operating an instrument whose design happened to align the strongest man's self-interest with the community's protection — and an arrangement in which those two point the same way is the rarest and most valuable thing any study in this series has found. That the alignment was accidental, and that nobody in the eleventh century understood it as a design, does not make it less real. It makes it the one thing in this whole case that a later age might actually want to know how to build on purpose.

What it did not protect was everyone outside the room where the arithmetic operated. The alignment held between the sultan and the caliph, and it held between the sultan and the scholars, and it held between the sultan and the towns. It never reached the man who grew the food. He was not a party to the arithmetic, had nothing any party needed except his assessment, and was accordingly the one person in the empire for whom the whole magnificent structure of mutual restraint made no difference at all.

A note on sources.

The Latin chronology — the *Dictatus Papae* of 1075, Henry IV at Canossa in January 1077, the Concordat of Worms in 1122, Gregory VII's death at Salerno in 1085 — is standard and is not argued here. The comparison is offered as a structural parallel rather than an identity: a papal consecration and a caliphal investiture are different instruments, one a sacrament performed once on a person and the other closer to a subscription that is renewed weekly in the sermon and can be withdrawn as easily as given, and they decay differently and are vulnerable to different attacks. The companion study of Rollo and Tughril in this series sets out that caution at length.

The contrast between institutional ordination and personal licence, and the inference that it explains the absence of an Islamic investiture controversy, follows from George Makdisi's account of the *ijāza* as established in the module on formation;

the inference itself is this study's and is offered as a proposition to be tested against other cases rather than as a settled finding.

Al-Mustarshid's defeat near Hamadhān and murder in 1135 are treated in the module on collapse. The figures for madrasas at Cairo and Damascus are the standard reference figures and are given as reported. The calendar of 1079 and Omar Khayyām's participation are standard.

The counter-position in this module is composed, not quoted. It is an attempt to state the case for the dynasty as its best advocate would state it, drawing on claims that appear in the historiography rather than on any single author, and it is answered point by point rather than dismissed.

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